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THE RING O' BELLS

GEORGE R. SIMS

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THE RING O' BELLS

ETC.

BY

GEORGE R. SIMS

AUTHOR OF 'ROGUES AND VAGABONDS,' 'HOW THE POOR LIVE,' 'THE DAGONET BALLADS,' 'THREE BRASS BALLS,' 'THE THEATRE OF LIFE,' ETC.

London

CHATTO AND WINDUS, PICCADILLY

1886

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To

BESSIE,

MY BRAVE AND GENTLE WIFE,

THIS BOOK

IS

Affectionately dedicated

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THE RING O' BELLS.

PROLOGUE.

THE tumblers were rattled upon the table, sticks were thumped upon the floor, and there was a stentorian chorus of 'Brayvo, Sparkins!'

Mr. Sparkins, the esteemed and respected parish clerk of Marshton-by-the-Sea, a small, rambling fishing town on the Essex coast, had just delighted the company assembled in the parlour of the Ring o' Bells public-house with 'The Mistletoe Bough.' Mr. Sparkins was an elegant singer, and he lent a sentimental tone to all his songs by giving them forth with closed eyes. Whenever Mr. Sparkins sang—and he was the most popular visitor to the free-and-easy which was held every Friday night in the parlour of the Ring o' Bells—he always commenced by coughing and clearing his throat, then he took a couple of whiffs at his long churchwarden, and solemnly and gently laid it on the

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table by the side of his glass of grog; then he leant back in his chair, inserted his thumbs under the armholes of his waistcoat, spread his fingers out, closed his eyes, gave another little cough, and commenced. He kept his eyes closed from the first verse to the last; he never even opened them during the chorus, no matter how jovial and rollicking it might be. For twenty years in succession Mr. Sparkins had obliged the company on Christmas Eve with 'The Mistletoe Bough.' He kept it for the occasion. When Sparkins commenced 'The Mistletoe Bough,' the landlady, Mrs. Van Hooten, always came into the parlour and stood respectfully by the door. At the conclusion she always shed a tear, and wiped it away with the corner of her neat little black satin apron. Mrs. Van Hooten was a widow. The last thing on earth that the lamented Van Hooten had heard was 'The Mistletoe Bough' sung by Mr. Sparkins. He had taken the chair at the concert, and had cheered Mr. Sparkins as vociferously as anybody; then his red face had turned suddenly purple, there had been a gurgle, and the landlord of the Ring o' Bells had dropped his head down quietly among the pipes and glasses, and had gone to sleep for ever.

The circumstance lent a solemnity to the Christmas Eve gathering under the old-fashioned roof. It imparted an air of chastened sorrow to what

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would otherwise have been a jovial occasion, but it also added in a sense to the festivity. Mrs. Van Hooten, having shed the tributary tear, always rang the bell, and Polly, the waitress, appeared with a bowl of exquisitely brewed punch; and in this cheering beverage the company, standing and in solemn silence, drank to the memory of the late Nicholas Van Hooten, once skipper of a passenger boat running between Rotterdam and Harwich, and latterly the landlord of the Ring o' Bells.

This Christmas Eve, when the song was over and the landlady's in memoriam tear had been shed and dried, and just as Polly was entering with the bowl of punch and a tray of glasses, and the company were preparing to drink to the departed Dutchman, an extraordinary event occurred—an event unparalleled in the history of the house.

A young woman, pale, trembling, and evidently ill, pushed open the door, glanced round the room, gave a little cry, staggered towards the landlady, and then fell down in a swoon upon the floor.

The gentlemen rose hurriedly from the table. Polly, the waitress, ejaculated, 'O Lord, ma'arm!' and let the tray of glasses fall with a smash; and the landlady, after giving a hurried and terrified glance at the prostrate form, exclaimed, 'Run for a doctor, somebody, quick—and the rest of you go!'

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There was a hurried stampede of guests—married men most of them, who had taken in the situation at a glance. They all went in a body to the village surgeon, Dr. Lambert, and Polly and her mistress were left alone with the senseless woman.

Half an hour afterwards Dr. Lambert, who had been out when the free-and-easy deputation arrived, came puffing and blowing into the parlour.

'You are too late, sir,' said the landlady, pointing to the sofa, which had been rapidly turned into a bed by Polly.

'Too late!' cried the doctor. 'Is she——'

'Dead!' answered the landlady. 'God help the poor creature! She only opened her eyes once; she spoke a few words in some foreign language as I didn't understand, and then fainted again.'

At that moment there was a feeble cry.

The doctor looked in the direction from which it came, and exclaimed, 'God bless me, what an extraordinary event! Tell me all about it.'

The landlady told him all about it, and he went away and told everybody else; and that night everybody in Marshton-by-the-Sea knew that there had been a death and a birth on Christmas Eve at the Ring o' Bells.

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CHAPTER I.

'THEN you mean to keep the child yourself, Mrs. Van Hooten?'

'At present, certainly. If I don't I must send it to the workhouse; and I don't, somehow, seem to have the heart to do that.'

'You are a good creature, Mrs. Van Hooten,' said Mr. Sparkins, for it was the parish clerk who was conversing with the landlady over his morning glass on New Year's Day. 'You are a good creature, and I hope the infant will grow up and be a blessing to you. I suppose you haven't the slightest clue to who the mother was yet?'

'Not the slightest, Mr. Sparkins. Dr. Lambert has made every inquiry for me. The poor thing was seen at Harwich in the morning. It's certain that she landed from the Rotterdam boat. Dr. Lambert had a long talk with the stewardess, and she remembers seeing her on board, and she seemed very ill. The porter at Harwich is certain that the young woman was alone at the station, and got into the train alone—the local that stops here.'

Mr. Sparkins was not the only customer who questioned the landlady as to the mysterious occurrence of Christmas Eve. It was a nine days' wonder in the sleepy, old-fashioned town, and the

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house did quite a roaring trade in consequence. When 'the poor creature'—the accepted name in Marshton for the dead woman—was carried to the grave in the little parish churchyard, half the inhabitants of Marshton were present at the ceremony, and the event was considered quite romantic. The men of Marshton flocked to the bar afterwards and discussed the mother; the women of Marshton made their way into the landlady's private parlour and inspected the baby; but neither the men nor the women were able to arrive at a satisfactory conclusion as to what could have induced the young foreign lady to cross the water and come to Marshton-by-the-Sea under such strange circumstances.

The nine days, however, went by and were followed by many more days, and gradually the event dropped out of general conversation. But the baby—a little fair, blue-eyed, Dutch doll of a baby—grew apace, and crowed and cried lustily, took very kindly to its home and its nurse—specially engaged—and to Mrs. Van Hooten. Every effort to trace the friends of the foreign lady failed, and no one came over from Holland to clear up the mystery. The headstone on the grave in the churchyard had only a number upon it, for not even an initial was found upon 'the poor creature's' clothing—not a scrap of writing was found about her that could identify her even with a Christian

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name. When it was time for the baby to be christened, Mrs. Van Hooten gave it the first name that came into her head, and that was Mary; and for a surname it was decided that she should be called after the country from which her mother was supposed to have come. And so it came about that a pretty little baby called Mary Holland grew up to be a pretty little girl at the Ring o' Bells.

But, alas! as she grew in stature she did not grow in favour with her benefactress. After a year or two the landlady made no concealment of her annoyance at having—to use her own words—'another woman's brat' billeted upon her. And yet she obstinately refused the suggestion of Mr. Sparkins that 'the brat' should be sent to the workhouse.

Mr. Sparkins—good fellow as he was—had resented little Mary's installation from the first, for he, being a widower, had conceived the bold design of one day succeeding the departed Dutch skipper, and painting the name of Sparkins upon the signboard of the prosperous house. And he felt that 'the brat' was a fixture which he would have to take over with the goodwill.

But he was not going to lose a chance for that. After all, if you marry a widow you must expect an encumbrance—better one of somebody else's than seven of her own.

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So Mr. Sparkins popped the question, and was refused—refused with scant courtesy—and retired crestfallen and indignant, vowing that he had been led on and encouraged, and that he would never set his foot inside the house again.

Mr. Sparkins was the more bitterly disappointed as he knew he had lost a prize. He had been to Somerset House and inspected the will of the Dutch skipper, and he had found it a very short and informal document, leaving everything to 'my wife,' and had ascertained that everything meant not only the Ring o' Bells, but a well-invested sum of ten thousand pounds, and some substantial house property in London.

Mr. Sparkins would have forgiven the refusal, but the scorn stung him to the quick. It rankled in his heart and made him vindictive, and in a Christian and parish-clerkly way he swore to humble the lady's pride. But he could not see how it was to be done. He never would have seen but for an accident, which put him on the right scent—a scent which he followed until——but I must not anticipate. Mr. Sparkins was content to wait for his revenge, and the reader must be content to wait with him.

He had the first instalment of it when Christmas Eve came round, and the old customers gathered in the parlour for the free-and-easy, and for the first

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time for twenty years there was no Sparkins and no 'Mistletoe Bough.'

The absence of Sparkins and 'The Mistletoe Bough' weighed upon the assembly. It seemed to them that the glory of the house had suddenly departed. In vain the landlady pressed some one else to sing the song; no one would volunteer. The company would as soon have thought of saying Mr. Sparkins's 'Amens' in church for him as of singing his Christmas song at the Ring o' Bells.

This sudden break in the time-honoured custom of the house occurred when little Mary was seven years old. Sparkins had not been over-hasty, you see, in proposing to the widow.

One by one the guests shook their heads and grunted, and expressed their determination to shirk the honour of standing in Sparkins's shoes, and the landlady was about to flounce out of the room in a huff, when from the snow-covered street outside the fierce north wind bore to their astonished ears the well-known tune. Yes—it was 'The Mistletoe Bough.' It was being played, and exquisitely played, on the violin. Before the company could recover from their astonishment, a fresh, clear, youthful voice took up the tune, and, to the accompaniment of the street musician, sang the grand old song, in such a manner as to electrify the audience. Never even in the best days of his vocal powers had

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Sparkins sung it like that. The landlady would be avenged. 'The Mistletoe Bough' should crown the feast; the tributary tear could be shed and wiped away, and the punch could be carried in without the slightest alteration in the time-honoured custom of the house, for a singer of 'The Mistletoe Bough' who could beat Mr. Sparkins hollow was within hail.

As the violin ceased and the boy's voice died away, there was a dead silence. Then the oldest customer, laying down his churchwarden, suggested that the musician should come in and sing the song. The proposal was carried nem. con., and Mrs. Van Hooten opened the door and called sharply, 'Mary!'

There was no answer.

'Where's the brat got to, I wonder!' exclaimed the landlady; 'she's never about when I want her.' Then she shouted again in an angry voice, 'Mary, do you hear? come here directly!'

There was the shuffle of little tired feet along the passage which separated the parlour from the bar. A sweet, meek little voice said, 'I'm coming, ma'am, I'm coming;' and then, cowering and shrinking as though expecting a blow, a fair, blue-eyed little girl, shabbily dressed, thin and delicate and hungry-looking, crept into the room.

'Go up the street and find them musicians, d'ye

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hear!' exclaimed Mrs. Van Hooten, 'and be quick about it. Where were you skulking, that you didn't hear me call?'

'I came as quick as I could, ma'am. I was in the kitchen cleaning.'

'Don't answer me, Miss Impudence; go and do as I tell you.'

'Yes, ma'am!' And the frightened child, with her thin shoes and scanty, threadbare clothing, with her bare shoulders, blue with bruises and red with cold, shuffled out of the room again and ran through the deep snow, peering now this way and now that, to look for the musician and the singer. They were not to be seen in the street—they must have turned a corner; but which one? Little Mary went hot all over, although the wind was keen and cutting as a knife. If she returned without the musicians she knew what her fate would be. Yes! it had come to this. The hatred of the landlady had grown so intense for her *protégée* that hard words had been succeeded by cruel blows—the dead, unknown mother had left her child to grow up a household drudge, a Cinderella without a fairy godmother, a poor, persecuted little outcast, denied even the solace of childish companionship: for Mary was never allowed to go out and play with the neighbours' children; her place was the kitchen by day and the attic by night; the roughest work

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was hers, and all she got by way of recompense was the food the servants would not eat, and now and again some cheap, common clothing, which she was expected to wear until needle and thread could keep it together no longer.

Vaguely the child knew the story of her dead mother and her own strange birth. It had been impressed upon her that she was a workhouse brat, fed and clothed by the charity of Mrs. Van Hooten; and when at times the poor persecuted mite felt inclined to rebel, and resent the cruelty of her treatment, she remembered that she had no claim upon her mistress, and tried to check the feeling which she fancied was what Mrs. Van Hooten called her 'black ingratitude.'

* * * * *

To-night, as the poor child, shivering and trembling, plodded through the snow of the long street, peering through the darkness for some sign of the vanished musicians, the story she had heard of her dead mother came back and impressed itself vividly upon her childish imagination.

It was on a Christmas Eve—she knew that—that her mother had come to the Ring o' Bells and died. She must have come along this very street, through the dark and the cold. But she was in heaven now—in that bright place up beyond the silent stars that Mary had heard about from the little

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kitchenmaid—a girl who went to Sunday-school, and was never tired of repeating the beautiful Bible stories to the wondering child.

Mary had often thought to herself how it must grieve her dead mother to see her child so unhappy, and sometimes, while the cruel treatment of her mistress made her tears flow fast, she would compose herself with a mighty effort, because 'she didn't want her mother to see her cry.'

To-night her heart was full of the dead mother —so full that when, tired, and terrified at her failure to find the musicians, she sank down on a doorstep to rest a moment and think, she clasped her little red hands together, and, raising them to heaven, cried, 'Oh, mother, dear mother! ask God to let me find the musicians, and take them back with me!'

And as the innocent prayer died away on the child's blue lips sweet music filled the air, and a boy's voice rang out clear and sweet.

The musicians were found. 'The Mistletoe Bough' was being played and sung by them inside the very house on the doorstep of which the child had stopped to rest and pray.

With a new-born courage the child rose, and, standing on tiptoe, managed to reach the knocker and let it fall with a gentle rap.

In a minute the door was opened, and Mr.

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Sparkins himself—for it was the house of the parish clerk—looked out to see who his visitor might be.

'Hullo, young un!' he exclaimed; 'what the dickens do *you* want here?'

'Please, sir, I—I—want the musicians.'

Mr. Sparkins stared. 'Want the musicians!—what for?'

'Please, sir, Mrs. Van Hooten at the Ring o' Bells wants them.'

'Ho, ho!' said Mr. Sparkins, with a malignant grin, 'that's it, is it? She's heard 'em singing "The Mistletoe Bough" in the street, and she wants 'em to come and take my place, does she? Ho, ho! Then you go back, my dear, and tell her she won't have 'em. Say I heard 'em singing, and I fetched 'em into my kitchen and gave 'em some bread and cheese and some mulled ale, and they're sitting by my fire and singing "The Mistletoe Bough" to me!'

'Yes, sir,' said Mary, 'I'll tell her; but she said I was to bring them back—and if—I don't——'

The child hesitated. Mr. Sparkins looked at her earnestly, and then a look of pity overspread his parchment features.

'Poor little thing!' he muttered; 'how ill and cold you look!' Then, laying his hand gently on the child's shoulder, he said, 'Come inside a minute. I dare say you could eat a piece of cake.'

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Before the child could refuse the proffered hospitality Mr. Sparkins had taken her hand and was leading her along the passage to the kitchen.

Mary had no thought of resisting or making an excuse. She was too cowed and miserable to resist anybody or anything.

When Mr. Sparkins reached the kitchen he pushed the door open, and Mary found herself in a beautiful warm room, with a great fire blazing in it. In front of the fire sat a man and a boy. The man had long hair hanging over his shoulders; that was all that Mary noticed at first, for his back was towards her. The boy was a little fellow about ten years old, with a face as white and pinched as Mary's, but with bright dark eyes, that seemed to pierce the child through as he turned from the fire at her entrance and stared at her. He was dressed in a tattered coat, much too big for him, and a pair of old patched corduroy trousers. Round his neck was a faded comforter that had once been red, but was now a washed-out pink. The boy was warming his hands at the fire, and the man, seated on a stool, was bending forward with his elbows on his knees, and his face nearly touching the bars of the grate. By him on the floor lay a fiddle and bow, and Mary knew at once that he was the musician, and that the boy was the singer she had come in search of.

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The man heard the child's footsteps as she entered, and turned his face.

And then Mary saw that he was blind.

'Who is it, Jim?' asked the man mechanically and the boy with a strong Cockney accent answered:

'It's a little gal, master—a poor little gal;' and then, to Mary's astonishment, the boy in a few rapid sentences sketched her portrait, giving every detail of her features and her dress; and when he had finished, the child felt that the blind man could see her with the ragged boy's eyes.

Mr. Sparkins listened in wonder to the boy's accurate description. When it was finished he laughed.

'You've taken a lot of trouble, boy, to introduce the old gentleman to the little girl. Do you describe everybody like that?'

The man himself answered the question. 'The boy is my eyes. When he speaks I am no more blind. He makes me to see everything. Every flower, every tree on the road, every house in the street, every face that comes near us—don't you, Jim?'

'Yes, master, I tries,' answered the boy.

'The child is cold,' said the man, turning his face towards Mary, as though he were looking steadily at her, 'Come to the fire; there is room.'

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'How do you know I am cold, sir,' asked Mary, 'if you cannot see me?'

'Cannot see you! I have seen you with my other eyes—Jim's—and I shall never forget your face now. I know you are cold—I can *hear* that you are cold.'

Mr. Sparkins laughed. 'That's a good un!' he said; 'I never knew of anybody hearing what another person felt.'

'Ah, he can, though, sir!' exclaimed the boy. 'He can 'ear things as you and I can't. He can 'ear things sometimes quicker than I can see 'em. Why, when I had the fever and he nussed me in London in the lodgin'-'ouse, he used to 'ear when I was thirsty; he used to 'ear when my 'ead ached; he used to 'ear when I was asleep. I ain't his eyes. I'm ony one eye, and 'is ears is 'is other eye.'

Mary, with childish curiosity, had crept nearer to look at this strange man who saw with his ears. The blind man put out his hand, and took her arm gently and drew her towards him. 'Come to the fire, my child,' he said; 'you are cold and wet with the snow.'

'And she's hungry, too—ain't ye, Mary?' said Mr. Sparkins; 'and you're going to eat this slice o' cake, and have a drop of mulled ale to warm you. It's good stuff to warm you; ask the musician.'

'It's real good, sir,' answered the boy; 'it unfroze me inside in a jiffy.'

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'It is very good, sir,' answered the man, 'and you are very kind to bring us into your warm bright room, and give us to eat and to drink. Now we must go, or we shall not get the money for our night's lodging. I shall play you one tune for your hospitality, sir, and then we shall go.'

The man took up his old violin, and presently it seemed to those who listened that the voices of the angels were filling the room with song. In all the years that he had been parish clerk, Mr. Sparkins had never heard such music. The man himself forgot his listeners, and played on in a kind of ecstasy. His face seemed transfigured. Suddenly the angels' chorus ceased, and from the strings of the old violin there came a plaintive ballad of human love—a woman's gentle voice sang tearfully of happier days. Softer and softer the music grew, until it seemed to the enraptured listeners that the voice was borne away from earth to heaven, and then, as it died away and was lost in the far-off clouds, there was a low sob and silence.

Mr. Sparkins opened his eyes with a start. The sob was so real. It couldn't be the fiddle. No fiddle ever sobbed like that. It was not the fiddle, but the fiddler. The sob was his—the violin had dropped from his hand and rested between his knees, and his cheeks, browned with sun, wind, and

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travel, were wet with the salt drops that trickled slowly down them.

Little Mary had listened to the beautiful music, and given herself up to it. All her terror, all her fears, had vanished. She forgot the hard task-mistress at home; she forgot the errand on which she had come; she only heard the music, and it seemed to her that she had suddenly stepped into a new world—a world of love and happiness and beauty.

This was the music that was played in heaven—the music of the angels' harps that the Sunday scholar had told her of; this was the beautiful music that her mother listened to up beyond the stars.

When the last sob had died away, and the player's head was bowed in grief, the child, not knowing what she did, stole up to him and put her arms about his neck, and touched his cheek with her lips.

'It is the angels' song that you have played, sir, is it not?' she whispered.

'Yes, little one,' said the man, slowly raising his head. 'It is the angels' song. It is the song of one who was the angel of my life.'

'Ah, I know,' cried the child; 'it is the song my mother sings.'

The man started. 'Your mother, child—your

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mother sings that song! You have heard that music before?'

'No,' answered the child, 'I have not heard it; but if it's the angels' song, it is my mother's, for she is with the angels now.'

Jim, the boy, had been silent unto now, but he had never taken his keen black eyes from his master. Now he rose from his seat by the fire, and touched the man upon the shoulder.

'Come, master,' he said, 'we must go. The houses 'll all be shutting. We shan't earn our lodgin' if we ain't off at wunst. Let's go to the public-'ouse we passed just now. We're sure to get a copper or two there.'

'You mustn't go to any public-house to-night,' exclaimed Mr. Sparkins, starting up from his reverie and pushing the kitchen-door to. 'Look here! I'll have the fire made up, and you shall sleep in front of it.'

'No, no!' said the man; 'you have been so good already.'

'It ain't altogether my goodness,' said Mr. Sparkins, with unwonted candour; 'but I've a particular reason for not wanting you to play at that public-house. They'll make you sing "The Mistletoe Bough," and there ain't going to be no "Mistletoe Bough" at the Ring o' Bells if I can help it.'

The mention of 'The Mistletoe Bough' and the

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Ring o' Bells brought Mary suddenly from heaven to earth; the old terrified look came back into the child's face—she saw Mrs. Van Hooten watching for her at the door, she saw the upraised hand, she felt the cruel blow. She remembered that it was nearly an hour since she left to find the musicians, and she pictured in an agony of fear the customers awaiting her return, and the rage and disappointment of the landlady at her long absence.

She turned to Mr. Sparkins with tears in her eyes, and entreated him to let the musicians return with her. In her terror she revealed the secret of her cruel treatment by Mrs. Van Hooten, and she cried out that she should be beaten and tortured if she returned without the musicians.

And all the time Jim, the ragged boy, stared at her with his searching eyes, and listened.

'All right, young un,' he said, when she had finished; 'you shan't be bullied for us. We'll go with her, won't we, master?'

'Yes, we will go. We will go and play and sing to them, and the child shall not be beaten.'

'Then, come now—now, please,' said Mary eagerly; 'come back with me, and say why I could not bring you before.'

'Right you are, little gal,' said Jim, picking up the violin and the bow, and putting them in a shabby, weather-stained green-baize cover. Then

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he held out his hand, and the blind man took it, and the child opened the door and beckoned them to follow her.

'If you will go, you will!' exclaimed Mr. Sparkins angrily; 'but I'd have made it worth your while to stop.'

'And the little one,' said the blind man, pointing to Mary; 'what of her?'

'Well, I'd have seen that she wasn't beaten. Look here!' he exclaimed, suddenly struck with an idea; 'you two stop here and enjoy yourselves. I'll give you a shilling, and I'll go back with Mary and tell the landlady what's happened.'

'No, we will go. These people who have sent for us shall have our music and our song.'

Little Mary, who was standing nervously at the open door, came back.

'Oh, do come!' she cried; 'please come!'

She took the man's left hand. Jim had his right hand already clutched in his.

The blind man smiled. 'Lead me—I am ready!' he said.

Then, slowly and gently led by the boy and the girl, the musician went out into the night, and Mr. Sparkins gave vent to his wrath by viciously poking the kitchen fire till the flames roared up the chimney.

'Confound the old fool!' he growled. 'I'd have

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given him a sovereign rather than he should have given 'em "The Mistletoe Bough" to-night; and the boy sings it better than I ever could.'

He turned away from the fire and flung the poker in the corner. As he did so he saw something shining on the floor, just where the blind musician had been sitting. It was an old-fashioned gold locket.

Mr. Sparkins picked it up in astonishment. As his fingers closed on it a spring was touched, and the locket flew open.

Inside it was the miniature of a woman.

For a moment the parish clerk gazed at the portrait like a man in a dream. He looked at it with his mouth wide open, and his eyes staring like the eyes of a man who suddenly sees a ghost.

For the face he gazed upon in the locket dropped by the blind musician was the face of a dead woman.

It was the face of the woman who died one Christmas Eve at the Ring o' Bells, and was buried in the parish churchyard as unknown.

It was the face of little Mary's dead mother.

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CHAPTER II.

WHEN Mary, followed by the wandering musicians, reached the Ring o' Bells, she was horrified to see that the lights were out in the parlour. Only the dull glow of the fire lit up the red window-blind. It was past closing-time, and the house was shut and the guests had departed.

At first the child was inclined to run away. She could not muster up the courage to knock, and go in to fall a victim to the volley of abuse and the shower of blows which she knew by bitter experience awaited her.

The boy Jim took in the situation in a moment.

'It's too late, master,' he said; 'the doors is shut. We'd better ha' taken the old gent's shillin'. We'll have a job to git a lodgin' to-night.'

The old man was silent for a moment; then he stretched out his hand and rested it on Mary's shoulder.

'You are trembling, my child,' he said. 'What is the matter? Are you so frightened?'

'Oh, sir,' sobbed Mary, 'you'll tell my mistress it wasn't my fault, won't you?'

At that moment the door opened, and Mrs. Van Hooten, who had probably heard the voices outside in the now silent street, darted forth, seized the child roughly, and dragged her in.

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The door was closed with a bang, and there was the sound of a heavy bolt shot, and then all was still.

'We can do no good, master,' said the boy. 'I'm sorry for the young un. I knowed what it was to be banged about myself afore you come to our crib and took me away with you. God bless you for it!'

He took the blind musician's hand to lead him away, but the man would not move.

'No, no; not yet. Knock at the door. Hark! Do you hear?'

A child's sharp cry of pain rang out on the night.

'We can't do nothing, master. Come along; we shall get into trouble ourselves if we gets hammerin' at the door. The perlice 'll come along, and we're wagrants, remember.'

'Vagrants! yes, it is true,' answered the man bitterly. 'We sing and play for our living, but not in a grand theatre or a great hall. We use the talent that God has given us to gain our honest bread, Jim, and so we are vagrants—outcasts—to be insulted and thrust aside by the law. I am blind, and a stranger in the land, so I am a thief and a vagabond. Where shall we go?'

'To the work'us, I suppose, for we ain't took a brown to-day. We'd better get on, else we'll spend Christmas in the perlice-station.'

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'No, you won't; you'll spend Christmas along with me!'

A hand was laid on the blind man's shoulder. The boy looked up, and recognised the gentleman who had taken them in to sit by his kitchen fire, and given them the hot mulled ale.

* * * * * *

Midnight had chimed from the old tower of Marshton Church, and still Mr. Sparkins and his strange guests sat before the roaring kitchen fire.

Mr. Sparkins had been most hospitable. He had mulled more ale, he had produced more bread and cheese from the larder, and he had ensconced the blind man in his own special easy-chair. The boy, tired out with a long day's tramp, had settled himself on a low stool in the corner, and fallen fast asleep.

Without saying a word about the locket, which the blind man evidently had not missed, Mr. Sparkins had gradually and cautiously led him to speak of his past, and had so far gained the wandering musician's confidence that he had volunteered to tell him the story of his life.

And this is the story that in broken English the blind musician told the parish clerk of Marshton-by-the-Sea.

'You will have told by my way of talking your language that I am a foreigner. You may

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not have guessed from my appearance or my manner that I am a noble.'

'God bless me!' ejaculated Mr. Sparkins. 'A nobleman playing the fiddle in the streets!'

'You find it hard to believe?' exclaimed the blind man. 'Listen to me to the end, and you will understand me. I am a Russian. My father was a rich noble. He was banished and deprived of his estates by the Tsar, because he dared to sympathize with the patriots who had espoused the cause of the people. I was a student at the time, and, smarting under a bitter sense of injustice, I flung myself heart and soul into the great revolutionary movement, which was then in the first stage of its development. I became a Nihilist.'

Mr. Sparkins dropped his pipe and looked at his strange guest nervously. He wondered if he had any dynamite in his pocket, and thought if he had it wasn't safe for him to sit so near the fire.

'You shudder at the word because you do not understand it. You judge us by the acts of the more desperate of our number. You know nothing of the bitter wrongs we suffer. I became a Nihilist, though I took no part in the deeds of blood which have stained the pages of our history. But I attended the secret meetings of the conspirators; I helped them to circulate the revolutionary papers

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which were printed under the very noses of the imperial spies. Our members included the richest and the poorest, the noblest and the most lowly born. It was in the revolutionary *salon* of Madame Dubrovina, a great Russian lady, that I met one day a beautiful girl, a young Dutch lady. She spoke English and French fluently, and had come to St. Petersburg as governess to the children of Madame Dubrovina's family. I fell in love with her; my passion was returned, and she consented to be my wife.

'Alas! I had a rival, a bitter rival, to whom I owe all the misfortune of my life. He was a captain in the imperial army, one Ivan Orloff—a conspirator himself, but a coward and a traitor. When he knew that Katrina, my beloved, had consented to be my wife, bitter words passed between us, and he came to the house of Madame no more.

'This was in the winter of 18—. The following spring Katrina and I were married. I was a fair musician. I put my talent to good account, for I was determined that my darling should not be the wife of a penniless idler. I forgot, in the first months of our happy married life, all my political dreams, all my revolutionary doctrines. I obtained the post of violinist in one of the theatres at St. Petersburg, and we lived comfortably on our moderate income. Katrina was a musician herself,

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and my playing delighted her. Night after night, when the theatre was over, she would sit at my knee in our humble lodgings and make me play to her. The tune I played to you to-night was the music she liked best.

'One night—we had been married about four months—I had played the favourite air, and I had laid down my violin, and taken her in my arms to kiss away the tears which the melody had brought to her beautiful eyes, when the door was burst open, and the police entered.

'Before I could utter a word my darling was thrust roughly from me. I was seized and dragged away. There was a mockery of a trial, and I was condemned as a Nihilist to the mines of Siberia—condemned for life.'

Mr. Sparkins shivered, and drew nearer to the fire. Siberia! Ugh! It made his teeth chatter to think of the place on Christmas Eve.

'I was condemned on the evidence of a traitor, the scoundrel who had never forgiven me for winning Katrina—Ivan Orloff.'

'But if you were sent to Siberia for life, how is it you are here?' asked Mr. Sparkins, again feeling a little uneasiness.

'I escaped after two years of torture worse than death; escaped, as many another poor wretch has done, only to endure the horrors of the frozen

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desert—days and nights of thirst and hunger, hiding in the huts of the poor peasants, who loved us and risked their lives to shelter us, because they knew that we were fighting their battle, that we had been punished for endeavouring to free them from the tyrannies of cruel masters. I evaded pursuit, and at last, broken down in health, worn, and feeble as an old man, I reached Switzerland, and was safe. In the house of a Russian refugee in Geneva I found shelter and hospitality; and then I endeavoured to find out what had become of my wife.'

'Go on, go on!' exclaimed Mr. Sparkins, sitting bolt upright in his chair, and fixing his eyes eagerly on the blind man. 'What did you find out?'

'I found that she had been compelled to fly from Russia, and that she had gone to her mother's home in Haarlem. Some months after my condemnation by the Imperial Court, Katrina's mother died. The day after the funeral, Katrina left the house. She had found something among her mother's papers which made it necessary for her to visit England—so she told the old servant who was my informant. Soon after I received the news, and while I was endeavouring to arrange a journey to England, I fell seriously ill. My health, which had been undermined by the rigours of a Siberian

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winter and the tortures of the prison-house, gave way entirely. When I recovered I was blind—blind as you see me now.

'I had vowed in my first grief that I would find my darling; if I wandered over the whole wide world I would see her again. God has decreed that I shall see her no more until I look upon her face in the land where blind eyes open once again.

'When I was well enough to travel, I set out with the little stock of money my good friend could spare. I bought a violin, and determined to make my way with that. It would at least find me in bread and shelter. I came by the steamer to London. It was in the great city that I should find my darling. Then my money soon went, and I had only my violin. But, alas! it earned me little. I was blind, and the streets were my last refuge. Yes, I, a noble, sank to what you see me now—a wandering fiddler, a beggar for the coppers of the passers-by. But what did I care? I travelled, I went from place to place, from street to street, and everywhere I played the music that she loved. I played and listened, listened for her voice to answer the message that the music would carry to her ears. O God, the agony of that sightless suspense! The dread that came upon me day by day as I shivered in the strange streets and

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fancied that she might be near and pass me by unseen.

'Last winter I fell ill again. Cold and hunger did their work, and in a low lodging-house in a wretched slum I lay between life and death. Then this poor boy, an outcast like myself, became my friend. He nursed me, tended me with a woman's gentleness. He begged and sang in the streets, and shared his earnings with me. He nursed me back to life, and took the fever of me; and then God was merciful, and I grew strong enough to pay him back and do as he had done to me.

'When he was well he would not let me leave him—he wanted to be my eyes, to wander away with me and sing while I played; and so we wandered forth, the Russian noble and the London arab, the blind man and his eyes, together to seek Katrina.

'Ah, how I thanked God for that boy's dog-like devoted love! I showed him the face of my lost one in the locket that I had never parted with, that I had kept concealed through all the long months in the cruel mines. He knows her face now, and "my eyes" are ever on the watch for it. He will know it among a thousand, and some day he will clutch me and cry out, "Master, it is Katrina!"'

Mr. Sparkins felt a great apple come up in his throat. From his heart he pitied the blind musician

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now. He knew that no voice would ever utter the words the wanderer longed to hear. He coughed violently to conceal his emotion, and asked in the most unconcerned voice he could manage why the musician had come to Marshton.

'We have come here as we go anywhere. We tramp from town to town. We shall tramp on until I die, unless I find Katrina.'

'But why did she come to England?'

'She came to find her father.'

'To find her what?' exclaimed Mr. Sparkins.

'Ah, I did not tell you about that. Katrina's mother was the wife of a man who had deserted her when Katrina was a child—a rascally Dutchman, never fit to be the husband of a good woman. He left her, led a roving, seafaring life, and settled over here in England. Katrina told me the story of her life before we were married. This man—this Dutch villain—had left them to struggle with poverty, and had married another woman, with whom he was living in England.'

Mr. Sparkins swallowed his smoke, and struggled with his breath for several seconds. At last he managed to gasp out, 'The Dutchman's name?'

'Van Hooten.'

Mr. Sparkins sprang up, and flung his pipe on the floor.

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'By Jove!' he exclaimed; 'I understand it all now.'

'Understand what?'

'Why, your wife came to the Ring o' Bells one Christmas Eve.'

'My wife? Good God, man! You knew her? Where is she—where is Katrina?'

'She came here to this place years ago. She came to find her father, and she found a woman who bore his name, and I believe she told that woman enough to let her know that she had never been Van Hooten's wife, and that the child who was born was the heiress of all the rascally Dutchman left in his will.'

'Man! man!' cried the blind musician, great drops of perspiration bursting from his forehead, 'what do you mean—what child?'

'The child that was here just now—the child who was born at the Ring o' Bells the Christmas Eve your wife came there and died.'

There was a wild cry and a fall. The sleeping boy sprang up and rubbed his eyes, then fell upon the blind man's body and wailed out, 'He is dead! he is dead! Master, master, speak to me!'

Then he jumped up and clenched his fist, and sprang at Mr. Sparkins.

'Curse you! if you have done this I will kill you!'

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Mr. Sparkins stared in astonishment and fear at the boy, who had seized him as a tiger seizes its prey. He was wondering what on earth to do to soothe his assailant, when the blind musician raised his head and spoke.

'Jim,' he whispered, 'Jim, my boy, we shall search no more for Katrina—she is——'

Then his head fell back again, and the boy knelt down beside him and covered his face with tears and passionate kisses. And Mr. Sparkins, not knowing whether he was on his head or his heels, rushed off terrified for Dr. Lambert.

CHAPTER III.

It was Christmas 'morning. The bells rang out from the church steeple; the sun, with a jolly red Christmas face on him, came out from behind the grey clouds heavy with snow, and gave promise of breaking out into a good shine directly he could get a chance; little by little the village put on a festive air, and warmly clad and rosy-faced folks began to emerge from the houses, and pick their way through the snow; the little boys of the village gathered at the corners in new caps and new woollen comforters, and showed their Christmas presents to each other; and the little girls, keeping a respectful

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distance from the boys for fear of having their finery snowballed, put their arms about each other's waists and necks, and indulged in that exchange of confidences with regard to family affairs which the female mind finds necessary to its happiness, alike in childhood, in womanhood, and in garrulous old age.

By ten o'clock the older people had, some of them, come out, and were exchanging visits of compliment and congratulation, and little groups of two and three gathered round doorways, and discussed a variety of topics, from the state of the weather to the price of Christmas beef and the last village scandal.

At ten precisely, Mr. Sparkins came out of his house and proceeded, not towards the parish church, but in the direction of the Ring o' Bells. He was accompanied by a blind musician and a ragged little boy.

At about the same time little Mary, who had been shut up all night in an empty attic, and who had cried herself to sleep and dreamed of a land where she would not be beaten and tortured by a cruel taskmistress, heard the key turn in the lock, and found herself face to face with Mrs. Van Hooten.

The child cowered and shrank back into a corner.

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'Don't beat me again!' she cried; 'please don't! I—I couldn't help it—indeed I couldn't! I tried to bring the musicians last night, but they wouldn't come.'

'None of your lies, you little hussy!' exclaimed Mrs. Van Hooten; 'you didn't look for 'em. You got off staring in the shop-windows. A nice thing, indeed—all the company waiting and drumming their heels while a brat like you was gallivanting about.'

'Please, it was Mr. Sparkins kept me. I told you so last night.'

'What 'ud he want with a little wretch like you?'

'I—I don't know, ma'am—indeed I don't; but he wouldn't let the musicians come for ever so long.'

'Oh, he wouldn't, wouldn't he? Well, I haven't got him here, but I have got you, and I'm going to teach you to go a arrand smarter next time. Don't sit howling and trembling there. I'm not going to thrash you again.'

'Thank you, ma'am.'

'No! I'm going to punish you another way. It's Christmas Day to-day: there'll be puddings, and pies, and lots of nice things for decent folks, but none for you. You're going to spend your Christmas Day in the beer-cellar.'

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'No, no—not there!' shrieked the child. 'It's cold and dark, and there are horrible things there —rats—and toads!'

'Oh, you remember the last time you were locked up there, do you? All the better—come along.'

She took the girl roughly by the arm, and dragged her out of the room.

'Let me stay here, ma'am!' urged the child; 'beat me, do what you like with me, but don't put me in that cellar.'

'You'll be safe there. You can howl, and nobody 'll hear you. If I leave you up here you'll be looking out of window and enjoying yourself; I mean you to have a Christmas Day that you'll remember all your life. Your spirit wants humbling, my lady, and I'm going to humble it.'

The child, finding all entreaty useless, controlled her sobs, and allowed Mrs. Van Hooten to lead her downstairs without a struggle.

But when they reached the back kitchen, and the door at the top of the cellar was opened, and the child could see the blackness below, her courage failed her again, and she fell on her knees.

'No, no!' she cried; 'not here! I'm ill—indeed I am! Sometimes I'm hot, and sometimes I'm cold; and my head aches, and my throat burns. If you leave me there all day I shall die. I shall die there alone in the cold and the dark.'

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Prayers and entreaties were in vain. Mrs. Van Hooten pulled the child up roughly from her knees, pushed her down the steep dark stairs, and then closed and locked the door.

'I'll give the brat a lesson,' she said; 'but for her we should have had "The Mistletoe Bough" last night, and that beast of a Sparkins wouldn't have had his paltry revenge.'

Mrs. Van Hooten went into the kitchen, gave her final orders for the dinner, bullied the servants, and generally gave relief to her feelings, and then went into the parlour. Just as she had settled herself down in her easy-chair by the fire there was a loud knock at the private door.

The servant opened it, and Mr. Sparkins pushed his way in. He was followed by the blind musician. Then the door closed, and outside in the street Jim, the boy, paced up and down waiting for his friends.

* * * * * *

Mary had been thrust so violently down the steep steps of the cellar by Mrs. Van Hooten, that at the bottom her foot stumbled and she fell forward heavily on the floor.

A terrible spasm of pain in her ankle caused the child to give a sharp cry. The door had closed with a loud crash, and the cry was unheard.

The child tried to get up and stand, but fell again. The ankle of her right foot was twisted, and the

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slightest movement caused her the most intense agony.

The floor of the cellar was damp and slimy. The darkness was terrible. The child's feverish imagination was filled with nameless horrors. There were crawling, creeping things in the place, she knew, and every moment as she lay there helpless she expected to feel the cold touch of one of them against her limbs.

It seemed like a hideous nightmare. She tried to shriek, to cry aloud for help. She could not utter a sound. Presently she felt sick and giddy, the place swam round with her, her temples throbbed, her breath came hot and quick. She peered into the darkness, and fancied she could see two red fierce eyes fixed upon her. She shrank back, but still no cry came from her lips. Presently she looked again; the eyes were coming nearer—she could hear something like the scratching of claws on the cellar floor. Then she remembered that a ferret had escaped and been lost in this cellar a day or two before—a ferret that she had seen suck the blood of a live rabbit once. It was the ferret she could see.

It would fasten upon her, perhaps upon her face or upon her neck. She could see its fierce red eyes fixed upon her still. It was waiting—waiting for its prey. She felt an icy chill rising round her

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heart. She felt a numbness stealing over her limbs, and the pain of the twisted ankle was growing harder and harder to bear. By-and-by she would lose her senses. She knew what the feeling creeping slowly over her meant. She would lose her senses, and lie there motionless and helpless, and the horrible ferret would——The child had worked herself up into a fever of nervous fear. With a great effort she raised herself to her knees, and, joining her hands, sobbed out a prayer to the dead mother whom she believed to be up in the stars at the right hand of the kind God that the kitchen-maid who went to Bible-class had told her about.

The child sobbed out a passionate entreaty to the mother to intercede for her—to ask God to protect her and save her, and deliver her in this her hour of agony and torture. She prayed and prayed, the childish words of supplication growing louder and louder as her hysteria increased, until at last they became unintelligible, and died away in a loud shriek, as the red eyes suddenly came with a dart to where she knelt. She dashed her hand down to strike the animal away; its sharp little teeth bit fiercely at her finger, fastened into the tender flesh, and then, with a wild cry of terror, the child fell senseless on the dank, wet floor of the cellar.

At that moment a sudden burst of sunshine lit

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up the dismal place. The flap through which the barrels were lowered from the street had been torn up and flung back. Jim, the boy, pacing outside, had heard the shriek of agony, and had tugged at the iron ring till the rotten woodwork splintered away from the bolt and the flap flew up. Then he swung himself through, caught the edge of the aperture, and dropped on to the floor. In a moment he had the senseless child in his arms, and was up the stairs shouting and hammering at the door Mrs. Van Hooten had closed and locked.

* * * * * *

The interview between Mr. Sparkins, the blind musician, and Mrs. Van Hooten had been fierce and stormy. Mr. Sparkins had been spokesman, and had come to the point. He had challenged Mrs. Van Hooten to deny that the woman who died in her house seven years before had explained that she was the daughter of the man who had left a lawful wife in Holland, and married another woman, Mrs. Van Hooten herself. The blind musician had told his story, and had demanded his child, and the landlady of the Ring o' Bells, driven into a corner, and threatened by Sparkins with the terror of the law unless she confessed the truth, had offered to come to terms. They had forced her to admit that the dying woman had told her she had come to see Van Hooten, her father, believing him to be alive;

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that she had found among her mother's papers the secret of his whereabouts, and the object of her journey was to ask him to befriend her and the child she was about to bring into the world. The landlady had confessed that she knew she had no legal right to the property Van Hooten had left to 'his wife,' although she believed the wife referred to was herself, and it was her fear of a thorough inquiry that had caused her to adopt little Mary, and so stop all further investigation by the parish authorities.

But when the father demanded his child, Mrs. Van Hooten, terror-stricken lest they should know how cruelly she had ill-treated her, declared that Mary had gone away—that she had gone to spend the day with the children of a customer at a farm a long way off. The landlady promised to bring the child to Mr. Sparkins the next morning. She hoped by that time to have made Mary presentable, and to have induced her to say nothing about her ill-treatment. And just as she was lying her hardest there was a furious knocking at the cellar door, and the voice of Jim, the boy, rang through the house, demanding help.

Sparkins knew the place, and went straight to the door, turned the key, and opened it; and Jim ran out, carrying in his arms the blind musician's senseless child.

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One glance at the livid face of the little one told the cruel tale of her sufferings. But the blind father saw nothing. He only knew his child was near him. He stepped forward with a cry, and Jim laid his burthen in his arms. The man bent down and pressed his lips passionately to the cold, tear-stained cheeks, and the child, half recovered from her swoon, whispered, 'Mother—mother, God has let you come to save me.'

* * * * * *

Another Christmas Day. The Ring o' Bells has passed into the hands of Mr. Sparkins, who manages it by arrangement for the proprietress, a minor, a pretty little blue-eyed girl, who lives with her father, a blind gentleman, up in London. Mrs. Van Hooten, terrified lest she should be punished for her cruelty to Mary, has left the village, and is living somewhere on an allowance which the blind gentleman insists that she shall have. She was cruel to his child, but she married Van Hooten in good faith, and not knowing that she was wronging anyone then. Van Hooten's property passed from his lawful wife by her will to her daughter, the poor girl who died at the Ring o' Bells, and Mr. Sparkins and the lawyers made good little Mary's claim to all that the law allows the next-of-kin to take. But the blind musician will not take the share that is his. He says it is all Mary's, and is to be nursed

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and taken care of till the day she gives an honest man her love and becomes a wife. His wants are few, and he has found leisure now to turn his musical talent to account, and compose the beautiful melodies which bring him fame and all the wealth he needs.

And Jim, the boy, is no longer singing in the streets. He is being educated, and losing all his street manners and his street slang. He sings in the choir of a West-end church, and there are plenty of people who prophesy a brilliant future for that glorious voice. Perhaps he may grow up into the honest man that Katrina's child will wed.

They are always together. They are together this Christmas Day, as the blind musician takes his old violin, the companion of his weary wanderings, and plays the angel song that Mary's mother loved. And when the blind man's tears flow afresh at all that melody recalls, Jim's hand grasps his in sympathy and love, and little Mary flings her arms about her blind father's neck and kisses every tear away.

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THE DOLL'S SECRET.

CHAPTER I.

THE BOAT EXPRESS.

'ANY more for the boat-train?'

It was two minutes to eight on the 24th of December, and the train that was to carry the Antwerp and Rotterdam passengers down to Harwich stood with its engine snorting and puffing, and making ready to start.

The few passengers had taken their seats, the carriage doors had been banged-to by the guard, who stood at his van-door ready to get in, when a young woman, closely veiled, and carrying a baby in her arms, came hurriedly from the ticket-office.

'Where for, ma'am?' shouted the guard.

'Rotterdam—first-class.'

'Step in then, quick! here you are.'

Gently the lady was pushed into a first-class

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compartment—there was only one other occupant —the door was banged-to, the guard blew his whistle, and the train moved out of the station into the night.

Once clear of the station, the lady gave a sigh of relief, and turned to see what sort of a person her fellow-traveller was.

He was a well-dressed man, she could see that, but whether he was old or young it was impossible to tell, for he had already settled himself to sleep, with his ulster wrapped about him, and his travelling-cap was drawn down over his eyes.

The young lady—she was not more than four-and-twenty—looked at the man uneasily, and then at her child. She would rather have been alone, but she had reached the station so late that there was not time to select an empty compartment.

The train was soon running at full speed, the suburban stations were rattled past one after the other, and presently the boat-express was whirling through the open country down to the sea. Its only stopping-place would be its destination—Harwich.

The oscillation of the train had caused one of the windows, insecurely fastened, to slip down. The lady, placing her infant carefully on the seat beside her, rose to pull the window up again and fasten it more securely.

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At that moment the man rose quickly, and came and stood beside her.

She turned with a sudden cry of terror; the light of the lamp fell full upon his face. 'Ned!' she gasped.

He seized her by the hand, crushing the silver bracelet she wore so fiercely into her wrist that she gave a sharp cry of pain.

'Traitress!' he hissed; 'so you've thrown me over, have you, and taken up with Jack Halstead! Your mother was ill, and you must go down and see her. You lied to me, you Jezebel! But I suspected you, and had you watched. I found out what the lay was, and what you were going to do for Jack.'

'Ned, forgive me; I—I——'

The girl, her face ashy-white, her eyes filled with tears of terror, would have fallen on her knees to her accuser, but he held her up firmly by the wrists.

'Forgive you, Em! Look at me; do I look in one of my forgiving moods?'

The girl raised her eyes and looked at her assailant, as though to read her doom in his face.

It was the face of a man of four or five and thirty—a dark, handsome face of the Jewish type. A closely cut jet-black beard and moustache covered the principal defect of the features—the hard, cruel

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mouth. Under the bushy black eyebrows two fierce brown eyes glistened with passion.

The woman looked at him a moment despairingly; then, suddenly changing her manner and her tone, she said, in a voice still tremulous, but with something of menace in it:

'Now, listen to me, Ned Marks. You've watched and you've spied, and you've found out—what?—that I've declined to put up with your devil's ways any longer. I'm tired of being fondled one day and sworn at and knocked about the next. I've a right to choose my friends, and if I am in with Jack Halstead now, that's my business, and not yours.'

'Not my business, isn't it?' exclaimed Marks, with a harsh laugh. 'We shall see about that, my lady. I've turned Queen's evidence—what do you think of that? I'm going up to the first policeman I see at Harwich, and I shall tell him what you're up to. What do you think of that?'

'You coward!' cried the girl, now fairly roused. 'So you're going to turn informer. Well, that's about all you're fit for. From a man who would treat a woman as you have treated me we couldn't expect anything else.'

'Well, if you've expected it, you've got it.'

'We shall see. I've done nothing. They can do nothing to me.'

'You've done nothing!' said the man, exasperated

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at the girl's bravado. 'That's a good un! You forget what you've got with you.'

The girl gave a little cry of horror. This man *did* know all, then. For a moment she hesitated then, with a sudden effort, she pushed him from her so violently that he fell heavily into the opposite corner. Before he could recover himself the frenzied woman had snatched her infant from the seat and hurled it through the open window.

And still the boat train rushed on through the night at the rate of fifty miles an hour.

CHAPTER II.

ON THE LINE.

THE night was clear and frosty. The stars were as bright this Christmas Eve as they must have been on that far-off night when, in the Eastern sky, they heralded the birth of the Holy Child in honour of whose coming the festival is kept.

Slowing past a junction, Luke Elmore looked up from the engine he was taking back to London, after having assisted to draw a double train laden with Christmas visitors to the country to its destination. He looked up at the star-spangled canopy above him, and remarked to his mate, Bill, that this

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was the reg'lar old-fashioned sort o' Christmas weather without the snow; and Bill replied that as far as he was concerned he didn't want no snow —he preferred to take his Christmas without it, for out of the 'picter-books' snow was sloppy sort o' stuff.

Luke agreed that the 'picter-books' did make the best of it. 'His little Milly, bless her heart!'— Luke called it ''er 'art'—'had a picter-book for a prize from the Sunday-school, and it was all snow and red robins.'

And as soon as the signals were off, and Luke could let his engine go steadily on her way towards the great City again, he entertained his mate with a full, true, and particular account of the wonderful stories in this same book, which Milly had read aloud to himself and to her mother.

Once launched on the topic of Milly, Luke went ahead like his engine when the line was clear.

Milly was just turned eight. She was a fair-haired, blue-eyed, sweet little lassie—the honest fellow's only little one and his heart's delight. Milly, her mother, and the engine—all Luke's joys and cares were catalogued in these three words. Bill was not a family man himself, but he was a good fellow, and took an interest in all that concerned his mate, and was a first-class audience.

'D'ye know, Bill,' said Luke presently, 'she was

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a-readin' me the other day a story out o' that book about Santer Klawers.'

'What place be that?' asked Bill; 'furrin parts, I suppose?'

'Place—it ain't no place at all. It's a saint as comes o' Christmas Eve and puts presents in boys' and gals' stockins, and presents what's too big it lays on their pillers aside of 'em, so the book says.'

'Oh!' said Bill; 'fairy-tales, eh?'

'Summat o' that sort. Well, ever since she read me that there tale I've been a-wonderin' what I can get to put on my little gal's piller to-night for her to wake up and think as Santer Klawers sent her.'

'Ah!' said Bill, '*you're* a-going to be Santer Thingymyjig, then?'

'We shall be in by ten, and I shall have time to go to a toy-shop. But I'm a bad hand at buyin'; and the missus she's that busy with the puddin' and a-tidyin' up for to-morrow, she can't meet me. But my Milly shall have summat, God bless 'er, if I——'

'What's that?'

The interruption came from Bill. He was shading his eyes and peering eagerly ahead.

Luke Elmore looked over the side of the engine.

'There!—on the line!—right across it!' shouted Bill.

Luke put the brake on at once. It would take a

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minute to bring the engine up. Thank God she wasn't going full speed! Nearer and nearer they crept to this something that lay across the line.

'Great God! it's a child!'

Yes, there, right ahead of them, lying where the cruel wheels of the engine must crush into it, lay a child—an infant! Would the engine never stop? It *was* stopping, but it slid on and on, nearer and nearer. A yard or two more and it would be too late!

Luke leaped from his engine, and rushed in front of it. He made a wild dash at the little body, and dragged it aside as the engine, groaning, rolled slowly on over the spot, and then stood still.

Bill was down on the line by his mate's side in a moment.

'Thank God!' both the men exclaimed together.

The engine-driver had the little one in his arms now. It uttered no cry—it lay quite still and motionless.

'What inhuman wretch can have done this, Bill?' he cried. 'It's murder—it's been put here to be killed, or it's been thrown from a train.'

He lifted the veil which hid the baby's features. He listened for a sound—he watched for a movement. Then he shook his head gravely.

'It's dead, mate—poor little mite! and a decent

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woman's child. Look how carefully it's wrapped up—how well it's dressed!'

Bill had stooped down, and was examining the baby closely. Suddenly he started back, a look of intense amazement on his grimy features.

'Why, mate!' he exclaimed, 'what d'ye think it is?'

'What do you mean?'

'Look at it—touch its face.'

Luke Elmore did look at the baby, then gently, almost reverently, he touched its face.

For a second he stood 'struck all of a heap,' as he explained to his wife afterwards. Then he burst into a roar of laughter.

'Why, so help me never, Bill, if it ain't a Doll!'

CHAPTER III.

HOME.

By the time Luke Elmore had 'put his engine to bed,' as his little daughter called the process, and had had just one half-pint with his mate to drink 'A Merry Christmas' to him, it was past eleven o'clock. Luke lived in one of the little cottages built on the railway company's land at Stratford. It was the neatest, brightest, and most cheerful-

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looking in the row, for Luke had a tidy, clever little woman for his wife. She had that best of all gifts after a good heart—a light hand. Her quick, skilful little fingers were never idle, and they accomplished marvels. Her window-blinds and her curtains were at once the admiration and despair of the neighbourhood. With just one yard of cheap ribbon she gave her windows a grace that half a dozen yards failed to impart to its neighbours in the row. And the quiet coquetry of the little sitting-room—how shall I describe that?

The 'pals' that Luke occasionally invited to smoke a pipe with him on Sunday afternoons used to go back to their homes and rave about it, and feel discontented with their own unpicturesque, muddled-looking apartments. But for the lives of them they could not tell in what the charm of Luke's sitting-room consisted. There were no staring colours, no great china vases, no flaring pictures on the walls. It was just a woman's simple good taste and deft light hand that made ordinary things look beautiful.

'I'm sure I don't know,' Mrs. Tom would say, after her husband had demanded to be informed why his home looked 'so muddly-like' after Luke's. 'I slaves and works myself to the bone to keep the dratted place tidy; and I'm sure it's that clean you could eat your dinner off the floor!' And Mrs.

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Tom was right, but she did not know that all the cleanliness and all the tidiness in the world will not make a room look pretty if the owner has not good taste and knack in arranging the individual odds and ends that go to make up the *ensemble.*

Mrs. Elmore was giving the last touch to her Christmas decorations when Luke put his key in the door, and changed his dirty, coal-begrimed working boots for the slippers which always stood ready for him on the mat.

A few pieces of ivy, a sprig or two of holly, and one little bough of mistletoe—these were all the decorations; but Mrs. Elmore had used them so deftly and so prettily that when Luke came in he declared, with a smile of proud possession, that 'he was blessed if the room didn't look like one o' them bowers as the fairies as dances so much lives in in the pantermine.' And then, before she guessed what he was going to do, he had the fairy of *his* bower round the waist, and, nearly squeezing the breath out of her body, gave her a real bear's hug and a sounding kiss under the mistletoe.

'And how's the pet?' asked Luke, as soon as he had finished with the fairy and thoroughly inspected the beauties of the bower.

'Bless her, I had all the work in the world to get her to go to sleep, Luke! She did want to sit up so bad and see father.'

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'Why didn't you let her, missus? Once wouldn't have hurt her.'

'Luke dear,' said the good little wife, a shade passing over her comely face, 'you know what the doctor says. Our little Milly is so fragile, so delicate, that the least excitement is bad for her now.'

'She'll get stronger as she grows up, he says, though, doesn't he?' asked Luke anxiously.

'Yes, but the child's growing very fast—it takes her strength. We must be, oh, so careful of her now, dear! Come and look at her—come softly, Luke—she's asleep.'

Gently husband and wife crept together into the little room where their darling lay.

It was a sweet face that met their gaze—a sweet, fair face, set in a halo of golden-brown wavy hair—an angel's face, with its halo on, Luke said it was. Little Milly lay asleep, her lips slightly parted, her cheeks still flushed. She had prattled all day to her mother of Santa Claus, of the stories in her prize-book; her little tongue had rattled on nineteen to the dozen from morning until bedtime, and her little feet had never been still.

Long and lovingly the engine-driver lingered by the little bed that held his greatest earthly treasure. The poor fellow's heart was full; a big drop came into each eye, and rolled slowly down his cheeks. He was silently asking the good God he worshipped

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after a vague fashion to bless his darling, and give her the health and strength she needed, that she might grow up into a strong, hearty lassie, and be the comfort and the joy of himself and his good wife all their lives.

* * * * * *

At supper Luke told his wife about the doll. He had brought it home carefully wrapped in his macintosh, and had left it outside in the hall.

Luke was not quite easy in his mind about his conduct, so he told his story with a little hesitation. He wanted his wife's opinion.

He and his mate had discussed the matter, and his mate had told him he wasn't doing any harm in keeping it and giving it to Milly.

'You see, missus,' said Luke, 'I found it on the rails. Whoever put it there did it to play a lark, or else flung it away to get rid of it. It was most likely a practical joke. A passing train was expected to cut it up, and there'd be a wild story about a child bein' cut to pieces on the railway, while bits of clothes and things was found about. I've as much right to it as anybody.'

'Let me see this wonderful doll, Luke,' said Mrs. Elmore, when Luke had told his story. 'Perhaps there may be something about it to give us a clue.'

Luke went out and brought the doll in.

Mrs. Elmore took it, and stared at it with as-

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tonishment. It was a beautiful doll, with a fair waxen face and short curly hair; but it was dressed in a hood, and veil, and long clothes, and a warm winter cape and robe, just as though it had been a baby. It was the quantity of clothing and the wrapping up that had saved it from being injured by the fall.

'I never saw anything so like a baby in my life,' said Mrs. Elmore; 'and it's dressed just as if it was one. The clothes are all good, and might have been made for a real baby. But there's no initial or anything on them. It's a very curious thing, Luke, that a beautiful doll like this should be left lying on the line. It's too big to be dropped out of a carriage accidentally.'

'That's what I say, my dear. It was put there to give some of us drivers a skeer—to make us think we'd run over a child, p'r'aps. And that's why I think it 'ull never be inquired about; and so Santer Klawers shall give it to our little Milly, and won't she be delighted! She's always wanted a big doll, and now she'll have one.'

Mrs. Elmore was not quite satisfied that they were right in keeping 'the lost property,' as she called it; but at last she consented to Milly's having it on the condition that Luke told one of the officials at Liverpool Street about it, so that if it was asked for the owner might hear of it.

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'Not as it ever will be,' added Luke; 'for I'm as certain as I'm settin' here it was put on the line for a practical joke, and the owner expects it's cut into bits by this time.'

By such arguments as these Luke persuaded himself that he was now the doll's lawful proprietor and the 'baby' was put carefully away and covered up for the night, to be laid on little Milly's pillow in the morning before she awoke, that she might see what a beautiful gift the good Santa Claus had left for her in the night.

CHAPTER IV.

MILLY'S BABY.

MILLY ELMORE opened her eyes on Christmas morning, and saw lying by her side what at first she thought was a new little sister, such as her little neighbours' and playmates' mammas were frequently in the habit of presenting them with. At first she felt a trifle nervous. Why was it there, and why had her mamma put it to bed in its outdoor clothes? Milly sat up in bed and looked at it, then she touched its face, and gradually it dawned upon her what it was. With a cry of joy she jumped out of the bed and ran into the adjoining room.

'Oh, father! Oh, mother! Santa Claus has sent

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me a beautiful doll!—the beautifullest doll I ever saw in my life! Oh dear—oh dear! how good! how kind!'

Then, without waiting for a reply, away she danced again, and baby was lifted from the bed and carried to their bedside.

'Look, father! look, mother! isn't it beautiful? Look at its eyes! Oh, why they're open, and just now they were shut! Oh, you dear, beautiful baby, how I love you!'

Milly bent her head, and the wavy brown hair fell over the doll's face in a shower, as she kissed it again and again.

The engine-driver sat up in bed; the delight of the child was his.

'So, Milly, Santa Claus sent you that, did he?'

The child looked at her father. There was a roguish twinkle in his eyes that revealed the secret suddenly to her bright intelligent mind.

Gently she laid her baby on the foot of the bed, and ran to her father, winding her thin little arms about his sinewy neck, and raining her warm kisses on to his weather-beaten face.

'It was no Santa Claus—it was you, father! Oh, you kind, kind daddy!'

Then, darting from her father, she ran round the bed, and scrambled up to her mother's side and kissed her too.

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'Oh, mother, isn't he good? and isn't it a lovely baby? I shall love it all my life. I shall love it better than anything in the world except you and father.'

There was no more sleep that morning for father and mother. Milly was like a little mad thing. She must be washed and dressed at once, and sit by the fire with her baby. At breakfast baby must have a chair beside her—her great grief was that baby could not share her bread and milk.

From that day forward Milly's baby became a most important member of the family. The child endowed her doll with intelligence and life. She imparted all her little secrets to it; she soothed it when it suffered from imaginary ailments. She imparted to it the elements of education, and was deeply distressed that the conformation of dolly's legs prevented it kneeling down by her side and joining in her morning and evening prayers.

In the morning baby had to be dressed, and in the evening she had to be undressed and put to bed with Milly. When baby was taken out she had on the thick, warm, winter clothes that she had worn when the engine-driver found her.

On the days and the evenings when father was off duty, Milly would come and sit on a low stool at his knees, with her baby in her lap. The child

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was terribly afraid that now and then her father might feel slighted. She would talk to the doll for twenty minutes at a stretch, and then look up and take her father's big, hard hand in her little, soft palm, and exclaim, 'You're not jealous, are you, father? You know I love you just as much as ever.' Then she would look down at her doll and say, 'And you love your dear grandpapa, don't you, dolly?'

Sometimes in the late afternoon, when her mother was busy about the house and her father was away on his engine, Milly would be left all alone by the kitchen fire. The dusk generally made the child a little dreamy and melancholy, and once her mother came in quietly and heard her talking, with tears in her eyes, to her baby.

'Oh, my darling! what should I do if I were to lose you—if you were to die? But you can't die, baby; you'll never die. But I may die, and have to leave you. Oh, baby—my baby—what would become of you if anything happened to me?'

Then the little one hid her face on the doll's neck and sobbed.

'Milly—Milly dear! Why, what's the matter, my pet?'

Her mother had taken her gently in her arms, and was bending over her.

'Oh, mother, sometimes I think I shall die while

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I'm a little girl—die, and leave you and father and baby all alone.'

The mother's eyes filled with tears; the great apple came up in her throat. She tried to soothe the child with loving words, but she herself had felt a sudden chill of fear at her heart.

Milly, in spite of all that love and care could do, was not so strong as she should be. Of late the little face had lost its roundness, and the eager, bright blue eyes seemed to be set further back in her head. And she was not so gay and cheerful as of old. She moved about the house with a languid step; she grew tired earlier, and gave a sigh of relief as her head sank down on her pillow at bed-time.

When Luke came home that night he saw by the troubled look on his wife's face that something was the matter. She did not wait to be questioned; she told him of the child's strange words, and of her own fears. Luke had noticed the change in the child, but he had tried to convince himself that it was fancy—that Milly was growing too fast, and that accounted for everything. But he made up his mind that the child should go to a doctor, and they would know the truth.

The next day Mrs. Elmore, Milly, and the dolly went to a young doctor who had a considerable reputation in the neighbourhood.

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He was very nice and very kind. He patted Milly on the cheeks, took her on his knee, and admired her baby very much. Talking to her and chatting with her mother, he examined the child quietly, and then asked her mother a few questions. Then he put Milly and the doll in a big chair by the fire, and beckoned Mrs. Elmore to come with him into a little inner room.

'You must take great care of her,' he said; 'she's very delicate, and is outgrowing her strength. She's much too tall now for her age, and there is danger of disease developing. Don't be alarmed; give her plenty of good food; don't worry her with lessons, and keep her as quiet as you can. I'll write you a prescription; but time and care will be the best medicines in her case.'

Then he came back and patted Milly fondly on the head; pretended to feel the doll's pulse, which made the child laugh merrily; took his fee, and bowed them out.

'What did the doctor say, mother?'

Mrs. Elmore did not answer for a moment. Then, fearing the child might see the troubled expression on her face, she forced a little smile, and told Milly that the doctor said she was to be a good girl and take her medicine, and she would soon be as strong as father.

As strong as father! How Milly laughed! Hold-

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ing her baby with one arm, she clenched her little fist and held it up for baby to look at.

'I shall be as strong as father, baby,' she said; 'and won't you jump when I bring my fist down on the table about something I've read in the newspapers, like father does!'

But the days were coming when the child herself would know the truth—when the heart-broken engine-driver and his wife could no longer deceive themselves or listen to hope's flattering tale.

Milly grew weaker and weaker; she had hardly the strength to carry the big heavy baby. She had to set it up on a chair by her side, and content herself with holding its hand in hers.

Those were terrible days for the engine-driver and his good wife. Misfortune rarely comes alone in this world, and their cup of sorrow was destined to be full to overflowing.

Luke, endeavouring to conceal the fault of a fellow-employé, omitted to report a grave breach of railway discipline. He acted with the best of motives, and by one of those chains of circumstances which are woven by the fates for our undoing, he became involved in the consequences of the man's act. Several irregularities came to light at the time, and there was a bad accident on the line. The high officials were seized with new-born zeal, and severity was the order of the day. A

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dozen men were dismissed from the company's service, and among them Luke.

The brave little woman bore up as well as she could. She had, like a frugal housewife, put something in a stocking for a rainy day, and for a time, while Luke was trying to get taken on by another company, the stocking held out.

But Milly wanted so many delicacies now, and the doctor had to come so often, and things all seemed to go wrong together. It was a siege of troubles that the little woman had to take arms against. Alas! her armoury was but scantily supplied, and the siege was fierce and obstinate.

CHAPTER V.

THE LAST CHANCE.

THE early chills of autumn told on the child visibly. She had faded and grown thinner and thinner through the summer days. The autumn took the last remnants of her strength, and now she lay all day in her little bed, her thin arms hugging her baby.

Luke was out all day now, earning a shilling or two at odd jobs—anything that would keep the wolf from the door until the company would overlook his fault and take him on again.

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And to keep the rent paid and buy food and keep themselves from falling into absolute poverty, Mrs. Elmore looked about for work, and had an offer to go out and be a sort of housemaid to a young invalid married lady with too many babies, who wanted a person she could trust about the house until her husband came home of an evening.

But to accept the place Mrs. Elmore would have to leave Milly alone; and Milly, alas! needed all the care that she could have.

The child was very good. She lay as quiet as a mouse nestled against her baby. She could not prattle much now—she was too weak; but she would whisper in the doll's ear words of hope and comfort and affection. She was sorry for her baby to be shut up in the bedroom and never to go out, but she knew that baby would not think it unkind of her not to want to part with it.

Luke was heartbroken. When he came home he would go straight to Milly's bedside and sit there for hours and watch her, in the vain hope of seeing in the white sunken little cheeks some faint sign of returning health.

One night the child lay dozing; one arm was round her baby, and the other outside the coverlet. Luke had taken the thin hand quietly and held it clasped in his. Suddenly the child opened her eyes. She felt something fall on her wrist. She

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looked up and saw her father crying. She tried to raise herself in the bed to put her arms round his neck and comfort him as she used to do, but she was too weak.

'Don't cry, father,' she whispered, as she bent down and kissed her. 'Don't you cry. I know that I am dying, but I shall see you again, when you and mother come to me in heaven. I don't mind dying now. I thought it was so dreadful once, but'—there were tears in her own eyes now —'but, father, you will love my baby when I'm gone, won't you? Keep it, and love it, and think of your little Milly, and it will seem as if you had me with you when you look at my baby.'

'Hush, my darling! for God's sake, hush!' The strong rough fellow had broken down utterly. Milly's words went to his heart. He buried his face in the pillow, and sobbed like a child.

And it had come to this. His Milly, his fair-haired, blue-eyed angel, was dying—his home was ruined—he was disgraced—his wife had to feel the bitter sting of poverty. It seemed to him as though he had come to the end of his life, and all was blackness and doubt and fear beyond.

* * * * *

A ray of hope came to the afflicted parents one day—just a gleam of sunshine through the black clouds.

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A kind lady, who had been interested in Milly's case, brought her own doctor to see her, and the doctor said if she was sent to the Evelina Hospital for Children, of which he was one of the physicians, he would attend the child himself, and he believed he might cure her. He would not promise, but he had a great hope. The idea of parting with Milly, of letting her go where they could only see her now and then, was a terrible blow to Luke Elmore and his wife at first, but the child's life was at stake. They knew how good and kind the doctors, the matrons, and the nurses of the Children's Hospital were—a little girl, the daughter of a neighbour, had been at the Evelina for two months, and was never tired of talking of her happy, contented life there.

So it was decided that Milly should go.

They broke it gently to the child that she was going away to a nice quiet home, to be with other little children, there to be made well and strong again.

Milly, who had endured her long illness without a murmur or a fretful word, bore up bravely when the parting came.

On the morning that the invalid carriage came to the door to fetch her, Milly seemed brighter and better than she had been for weeks. Her strong will had conquered her weak body for a time. She was determined that she would not cry or seem

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miserable. She would go with a smile from home, and mother should leave her in the little cot at the hospital, and carry back home with her the belief that her Milly was happy.

Father stopped at home to see her off that morning. When all was ready he brought her the doll.

Milly looked at it wistfully for a moment, and then took it in her arms and kissed it. Then she handed it back to her father.

'Father,' she said, 'I shall leave you my baby. It will be something to remind you of me while I am away. You'll be fond of her and take care of her, won't you, for my sake?'

'But, my pet,' said her mother, 'you may take dolly with you, if you like.'

'No, mother; I won't take her. I don't want my baby to go to a hospital. I shall leave baby with you and father till I come home again. Only you must bring her to see me sometimes, won't you?'

The promise was given, the dolly was laid gently on the little empty bed, and Milly was carried to the cottage door in her father's strong arms.

Outside there was quite a crowd to see Milly off. Her little playmates nodded to her, and looked at her with mixed feelings. They were not quite sure whether to pity her for looking so ill, or to envy her the drive in that beautiful carriage, and the

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beautiful fruit and jellies and generally delicious things which they had heard the children were feasted on at the hospital.

As the carriage drove quietly away, Milly, propped up in her warm wraps, put her little white face to the window to take a last loving glance at her home. And she saw Mrs. Jones, and Mrs. Smith, and Mrs. Brown standing at their doors and waving their hands to her, and Mrs. Brown was rubbing the corner of her apron vigorously into her eye.

As the carriage turned the corner, and Milly let her tired head fall against her mother's shoulder, she just caught sight of her father going slowly into the house again. And she thought that he would go and have a good cry with her baby; and then she broke down and sobbed, and her mother sobbed too, and it was a very miserable journey all the rest of the long drive to Southwark.

CHAPTER VI.

FOR THE OLD LOVE'S SAKE.

'NED!'

A flashily dressed, handsome man, who was looking at the photographs in the window of the Stereoscopic Company's depôt in Cheapside, turned, hearing his Christian name, and found himself face

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to face with a very pale, very shabbily dressed, and down-at-the-heel young woman, who carried a bundle under her arm.

For a moment a look of pity came into the man's face as he eyed the girl from top to toe, and read her story in her pinched features and her faded, threadbare finery. But the look lasted for a few brief moments only. An evil smile came into the corners of the cruel mouth, and a gleam of malice into the bold brown eyes.

'You're a pretty wreck, you are, Em,' he said, walking by her side out of the crowd round the fashionable beauties' and popular actors' counterfeit presentments. 'Things don't look very rosy with you, my dear.'

'Ned, we have had nothing but trouble since that night you played the cruel trick on me in the train. Look what I've come to.'

'You've turned honest, evidently,' muttered the man.

'I'm working for one of the big City houses—making shirts at fourpence each, and trying to keep body and soul together at the price.'

'More fool you, then. Where's Jack?'

'In prison.'

Ned Marks gave a little whistle.

'Oh, that's news to me. I don't know any of the old set now.'

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'You're doing well, at any rate,' said the girl with a sigh, as she glanced at the big diamond horseshoe pin in Ned's scarf, and the heavy gold chain which his cut-away sporting-coat revealed in all its glory.'

'Yes, my dear, I'm doing pretty well, thank you. I've turned up the old lay and taken to the turf.'

'Ned, I don't want to beg—I never have begged yet; but I wish you'd give me a little help till Jack comes out.'

'Well, I like that—that's a good un! You desert me for another chap, and when he comes to grief you want to stand in with me again.'

'I don't ask it for myself, Ned. I know after what I did I've no claim on you; but my child—our child, Ned.'

The man lifted his eyebrows and pursed his lips.

'I swear it, Ned—*our* child. I was true and loyal to you till you drove me away from you by your cruelty. Our child is ill, so ill that I fear she will die. She wants good food, fire, warm clothes—everything that I cannot give her——'

'So Jack Halstead is in prison. Serve him right! And you're earning starvation wages at that game!' exclaimed Marks, pointing to the bundle under the girl's arm. 'Serve *you* right!'

'But the child,' pleaded the girl, her eyes filling with tears. 'She is innocent—she is suffering for

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our sins; won't you give me a little money for the child, Ned? I swear every penny shall be spent on her. I'd pawn my last rag rather than buy a crust with your money for myself.'

The man thrust his hands in his pockets and rattled the loose silver in them. It was his habit when he was thinking.

There was a minute's silence as Ned Marks and Em walked on towards the Mansion House, side by side—a strange couple, attracting the attention of the passers-by.

Then Marks withdrew his hands from his pockets and held out one hand to the girl. It was empty!

'No, Em,' he said. 'You took the young un with you when you bolted with Jack; let him keep it.'

He would have hurried away, but the girl held his arm.

'Ned, you're angry now—you're bitter against me. By-and-by your heart may turn a little—your better nature will speak for the child—for you have a better nature, Ned.'

'Glad to hear it,' said the man; 'it's news to me.'

'Yes, you have, Ned, or I should never have loved you as I did once. If you feel sorry for me presently, and you want to see if the child is as ill as I say it is, come to the wretched place where I live and see for yourself.'

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She gave him the address, and he wrote it down in his betting-book.

Then he nodded to her, said 'Good-bye,' and quickening his pace, lost her in the crowd of pedestrians that throng Cheapside at all hours of the day.

'So Jack's in prison, is he?' muttered Marks to himself. 'Must have been nabbed while I was abroad. Wonder if they ever heard anything of that doll. By Jove, what a fool I was not to ask her! If they didn't—and it was found on the line—it might be lying at the Lost Property Office now. I wonder how long they keep things there before they're sold. I ought to have put somebody on to make inquiries about the "missing infant" at the time, but I was afraid to. Those blessed 'tecs are so artful they might have put two and two together, and nabbed me on spec!'

* * * * * *

A week later Ned Marks called at the address his former mistress had given him. He found her room empty, and made inquiries of the tenants as to the absent needlewoman's whereabouts. He ascertained that, through the influence of her employer in the City, Em's sick child had been taken into the Evelina Hospital, and had become so much worse there that the mother had been sent for, and

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had obtained permission to remain with it till the end—now only a question of a few days—should mercifully come.

CHAPTER VII.

IN THE CHILDREN'S HOSPITAL.

It was visiting-day at the Hospital for Sick Children. The patients who were nearly convalescent were sitting in their little chairs up by the big fire at the cosy end of the ward, and mothers and aunts and big sisters were kissing and cuddling them and listening to their prattle.

But there were many of the invalids still in the little cots that stood along the walls of the long room. They looked so neat and pretty in their red day jackets! Some were too ill to raise their heads from the pillows; others were suffering from diseases which prevented them from using their limbs. Across each little cot a table was fixed, and on this were the toys the children played with when they could, or which they looked at and admired and loved when they were too tired to play any more.

Milly's father and mother were standing beside her cot and watching her as she hugged her baby —her baby that had been brought to see her now she was well enough to sit up in bed and nurse it for a little while.

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Milly was better. The doctor had kept his word, and skill and care had fought the good fight, and had arrested the progress of the wasting disease which had been sapping the child's strength. There was the old light in her blue eyes, the old animation on her fair little face, as she clasped her baby to her little motherly heart, and kissed its lips, and its eyes, and its nose, and its soft curly hair.

'Oh, my baby,' cried the child, 'how I have missed you! but I have never forgotten you. Oh, my darling, sometimes I was afraid I should die, and be put in the pit-hole, and never see you again!'

The child's eyes filled with tears for a moment, as she thought of the dark days and nights through which she had passed, a worn and weary little pilgrim in the valley of the shadow.

Milly's love for her doll—her baby—was a real, true motherly love. The love of a little girl for her doll is not a child's love for a toy. It is the dawn of the maternal instinct. It is nature asserting itself. The female child has the instinct from its earliest years. The little mothers of the poor have, many of them, real live babies to lavish their wealth of maternal love on—baby brothers and baby sisters who are their constant charges. And the little girls who have no live baby to nurse and cherish make a baby of a doll, and love it with a true motherly love, endowing the creature of wax and rag and sawdust

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with human feelings, and growing in time to believe it shares in their joys and sorrows, and understands all that they say to it.

Milly, though absorbed for a time in her baby, did not neglect her father and mother. She had always something to tell them when they came to see her. She knew the stories of her fellow-sufferers.

She had told the little girl in the cot next her all about her baby, and the little girl next her had told Milly all about a baby she had at home—a little brother, who was deaf and dumb, and this seemed very strange to Milly.

'Fancy, mother!' she said; 'Polly's little brother can't say a word or hear a word, and so he's like my baby, although he's alive. He can open and shut his eyes and cry, and my baby can do that.' She touched the spring that shut her dolly's eyes, and they closed; then she made them open; then she pressed the doll to make it open its lips and give the little cry that it used to do, and no cry came! 'Oh, father!' she cried, 'what have you done to my baby? It doesn't cry any more!'

'It's so happy at seeing its little mother again, it doesn't want to cry,' said Luke, with a smile, taking the doll to see what was wrong.

He pressed it gently at first, then with a little force, but the doll was dumb.

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'It's nothing, my pet; the machinery's out of order. I'll take it home and put it right for you. Dolly shall cry the next time mother brings it.'

The matron came up and spoke a kind word or two to the child, then turned to the parents.

'Our best and gentlest,' she said, with a smile. 'We shall all be sorry to lose our Milly.'

Luke walked a little way aside with the matron. 'She'll be able to come home before Christmas, won't she, ma'am?' he said.

'Yes, if she improves as she has done; but she will want the greatest care this winter. She ought to go to some sheltered place where the winter is mild. The London fogs and bleak winds will try her sorely.'

Luke sighed. Things were getting worse with him. Much as he longed to have his child home, he dreaded her return to the scant comfort he could give her; and she would want so many things that cost money now.

He went back to where his wife sat holding Milly's hand, and told her that at Christmas the matron thought Milly would be with them again.

'Oh, father!' cried the child eagerly; 'how long is it to Christmas, then?'

Luke reckoned up on his fingers, and told her that it was six weeks as near as might be.

'What a Christmas we'll have, father, won't we?

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You know Christmas Day will be my baby's birthday.'

* * * * * *

The time had come to say good-bye. Baby had been divested by Milly of its outdoor garments—the hood and cloak in which the engine-driver had found it nearly a year ago on the line—and now Milly, with her mother's help, was dressing her child again to go its 'ta-ta.'

Up at the far end of the ward, almost unnoticed, a young woman, dressed in threadbare black, had been sitting by the cot where lay her dying child. A little screen hid her from the general gaze.

Just as it was time for the visitors to go, a nurse came up to the young woman. A gentleman wanted to see her.

'A gentleman—wants to see me!' exclaimed the woman. 'Did he tell you his name?'

For a moment she thought it was her employer in the City—he had been so kind and good, and had listened to the story of her sick child with such sympathy; he might want to see it, perhaps.

But the nurse mentioned a very different person. The visitor was a Mr. Edward Marks.

'Sit by my little one a minute, nurse; I'll be back directly.'

Em—for it was she—cast one loving look at the little white face that lay upon the snowy pillow, its

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eyes closed in the heavy sleep that had succeeded a long day's pain and anguish.

Then, brushing a tear from her cheek, she went out of the ward to the hall, where Marks was standing.

'I'm sorry to hear about the young un being so bad, Em,' he began; 'I've come to say if I can do anything, I will.'

'It's too late,' the girl answered sadly; 'hunger and cold have done their work.'

'Oh, while there's life there's hope,' he answered; 'at any rate, it'll have a good chance in this place.'

'My child is dying, I tell you—it is a question of hours. Now that I know there is no hope I don't fret so much. Better my little girl should die now than live to be the lost creature her mother is.'

The man looked down at his boots, and put his hands in his pockets to jingle the loose silver. He wanted to say something, and didn't know quite how to begin. He wanted to ask the girl what Jack had done about the doll she flung out of the Harwich express when she thought the police were going to arrest her at the journey's end.

And while he was thinking how to put it without letting her see that it was not in the interests of the sick child he had traced her to the hospital and called her from its death-bedside, down the

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stairs came Luke Elmore and his wife, and the engine-driver had Milly's baby in his arms.

Em saw it in a moment, and started as though she had been shot.

'The—the doll!' she gasped, clutching Ned Marks's arm.

Marks stifled an exclamation, and stood back to let Luke and his wife pass out of the door.

Then, with a hurried word of farewell to the girl, he darted from her, and ran out into the road.

And, keeping in the shadow of the darkening streets, he followed the engine-driver stealthily, travelled by the same train to Stratford, and that evening he knew where the doll was, and determined that it should be his before many hours had passed.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE DOLL'S SECRET.

LUKE ELMORE had finished his tea, and was smoking his pipe by the fire and 'thinking things over,' while Mrs. Elmore sat at the table to be near the candle, and tried with busy needle and thread to repair the ravages which time and hard wear had inflicted on the family wardrobe.

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Poor little woman! She had not much time for sewing now. All the day was spent with the invalid lady overwhelmed with olive-branches, but the half-a-crown a day which the work brought in was very welcome now Luke was out of a regular berth. To-day she had asked for a holiday, that she might go with Luke to see Milly, and so there was a long evening, and it was devoted to the neglected household cares.

Mrs. Elmore stitched away, and Luke smoked on, absorbed in thought.

He had something on his mind—a secret which troubled him terribly, and which he had not dared as yet to reveal to his better half.

Some six months ago Luke, in an unguarded moment, had consented to be security for a friend who was borrowing twenty pounds of a loan office. He had signed a paper—as a matter of form, they told him—and now he had found out what that paper meant. The friend had paid only a few instalments, and, being in inextricable difficulties, had become bankrupt, and the office had politely intimated to Luke, in beautifully plain writing on a sheet of blue paper, that unless he paid the whole of the balance within a week the document he had signed would be acted upon, and his furniture and effects would be seized.

He had been to see the people, had explained his

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circumstances, and they had with rare generosity offered to let the balance stand over at interest if he paid seven pounds on the following Saturday.

Seven pounds! Why, it was a fortune to him at that moment. They might as well have asked him for a thousand.

He had to find an impossible sum of money or see his home broken up, and Milly was coming back with her one chance of a permanent cure—the tenderest nursing and every comfort. More than that, had not the matron told him that the child ought to be sent away to some warm place for the winter?

Whichever way Luke looked at the little clouds of smoke that rose from his pipe and floated up to the ceiling, there was trouble in them.

He was just wondering how he should tell his wife, and trying to think of some friends who might help him over the bad time, when there came a loud knock at the door—a rat-tat-tat such as only a tax-collector or a very superior sort of visitor would give.

'Whoever can that be, Luke?' said Mrs. Elmore. 'You don't expect anyone, do you?'

Luke imagined at once that it was a man come to take possession, or an officer of the county court armed with full powers to take the table and the chairs, the cat and the frying-pan, and even the

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mouse-trap in the back kitchen, put them on a van and drive off with them there and then.

He was by no means reassured when his wife, who had answered the door, returned, ushering in a dark, well-dressed gentleman, with a big diamond horseshoe pin in his scarf.

Luke had heard that these bailiffs were very great swells sometimes.

He rose to receive his visitor, and asked him in a faltering voice what he might please to want.

He quite expected the gentleman to reply, 'Everything you've got,' but the gentleman did not.

He looked about him as though in search of something, and then, accepting the proffered chair, asked Luke if he hadn't been that day to the Children's Hospital.

'Yes,' said Luke, 'I have. There isn't anything the matter with my Milly, is there?'

'She isn't worse, sir, is she?' asked Mrs. Elmore, looking nervously at the stranger.

'You mistake me,' said the gentleman. 'I was a visitor myself to the hospital. I have a little girl there—the daughter of a poor friend of mine.'

'Indeed! It's a splendid institootion, sir, isn't it?'

'What I come to you about is this,' continued the gentleman, taking no notice of Luke's question. 'The little girl I speak of saw you to-day with a very handsome doll.'

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'My Milly's, sir—her baby, she calls it.'

'The child took a great fancy to that doll—she is very ill, and it may be her dying wish. I should like to gratify that wish. How much will you take for the doll?'

'Money wouldn't buy it, sir,' answered Luke, putting his pipe in his mouth again. 'I'm sorry for your little girl, but mine 'ud break her 'art if we parted with her baby.'

'Come, you're a poor man. I'll give you ten pounds!'

'If we were starving, sir, and you offered us a thousand,' exclaimed Mrs. Elmore, chiming in, 'it wouldn't buy that doll.'

The man eyed the husband and wife suspiciously for a moment. Did they?—no, the thought was absurd.

'Well,' he said, getting up to go, 'I'll give you time to think it over. I want the child to have the doll. See here, I'll give you the ten pounds to lend me the doll for a week. The little girl might not live longer than that, and then you shall have it again.'

Luke Elmore shook his head.

'I tell you, sir, that no money will tempt us to part with the doll for an hour.'

'I won't take that for your final answer. I'll come back to-morrow.'

'You can save yourself the trouble, sir,' said Luke,

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as the gentleman put on his hat, nodded to them, and went out.

When Mrs. Elmore had shut the door on her visitor she and Luke thought the matter over.

It was rather an odd story—at least they thought so. Still it was quite possible that a child *might* have seen Milly's baby and taken a fancy to it.

One thing was certain, they would not part with it. The ten pounds would have been a godsend, but they might as well have been asked to sell Milly as her baby.

'By-the-bye, I'd quite forgotten about it's not crying to-day. Fetch the doll, missus, and I'll see if I can put it right.'

The doll was brought down from Milly's room—it always lay on her little bed now, carefully covered up from the dust—and Luke set to work to see if he could repair the spring, or whatever it was that made the doll cry.

To get at it, it was necessary that the 'baby' should be stripped.

Mrs. Elmore's deft fingers soon had the doll 'in a state of nature.'

But the crying arrangement was inside, and the doll would have to be opened.

'Where's it stitched?' said Luke, who was naturally ignorant where the anatomy of dolls was concerned.

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His wife turned the doll about, and pointed to its side. There the canvas that covered the baby's internal arrangements was neatly stitched together.

'Hadn't I better have something to catch the sawdust?' said Luke.

'No—it's stuffed with wool, I think. I can soon put that back again.'

Carefully, with her scissors, Mrs. Elmore opened the doll's side, and put in her hand to withdraw the wool that Luke might find the broken spring.

She drew the wool all out, and to her surprise found that it was wrapped round something else.

Inside the wool was a paper parcel, and this undone was found to contain small envelopes, and in the envelopes were little flat packets wrapped in tissue paper.

Amazed at the strange discovery, the engine-driver and his wife undid the parcels, and when they were laid out on the table their astonishment knew no bounds.

For the contents of Milly's baby turned out to be packets of precious stones—rubies, diamonds, emeralds, sapphires, and pearls. There they lay sparkling and glittering on the little table; and as Luke and his wife gazed on them in open-mouthed wonder, they both thought of the pantomime they had once seen at the Surrey Theatre, where a poor woodcutter suddenly found himself in a cave full of gold and precious stones.

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And while they were staring and wondering what it could mean, Luke's eye fell on the piece of newspaper in which all the little parcels had been wrapped.

It was a torn sheet of the *Daily Telegraph*, and in the middle of it was a large head-line, 'Great Jewel Robbery.'

Eagerly the astonished couple read it, and then they knew that about twelve months since the office of a dealer in precious stones in Hatton Garden had been broken into, and his safe rifled of the packets of gems it contained; and a thousand pounds reward was offered for such information as would lead to the restoration of the property.

The thieves had wrapped their booty in a piece of the first newspaper that came to hand, perhaps without knowing what the newspaper contained.

* * * * * *

That night Luke Elmore went up to Liverpool Street, and saw the superintendent, to whom he had communicated the fact of his having found a doll on the line. Now he told the astonished official the doll's secret, and handed over to him the valuable property which had lain so long concealed in the interior of Milly's baby. The superintendent told Luke to keep the secret a little longer, and sent back with him a detective, who was to sleep in the house, and assist at the reception of the dark

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gentleman who wanted to buy a doll for a little girl in the Evelina Hospital when he called on the morrow.

CHAPTER IX.

THE TRANSFORMATION SCENE.

'WELL, have you considered my offer?'

'Yes, sir, I have. I decline it still.'

'Well, I'm sorry; er—will you let me look at the doll a moment? Perhaps I can get one like it.'

At that moment a man steps out of the inner room, and between Luke Elmore and his visitor.

'How d'ye do, Mr. Marks?' he says.

Ned Marks starts and turns towards the door.

'Don't hurry,' says Luke's new lodger; 'we'll go together.'

'Where to?' stammers Mr. Marks.

'Scotland Yard. It's all right, Marks; I know you weren't in the Hatton Garden job, but you know all about it, or you wouldn't have been so jolly anxious to get this doll.'

'I'll tell you all I know,' says Marks, and they go out together. On the road to London the man tells his story. He has nothing to conceal now.

Jack Halstead committed the burglary—Jack, once his partner in certain misdeeds which have not been traced home yet. Marks ferreted out the

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truth from some of Halstead's gang, and also learned that his own mistress, a girl called Em, instead of going into the country to her people as he supposed, had taken up with Jack and gone to live with him.

Then he found out that Em was being used to convey the stolen jewels to a disreputable old Dutch Jew in Rotterdam, who had undertaken to pay for them, on delivery, about a tenth of their value. But the Jew was a careful man, and concocted a scheme by which they could reach his hand without much risk, in case the detectives should be on the watch.

Jack was to get a doll, the size of a baby, and sew the jewels inside it. Then a woman was to bring the baby, dressed as like to life as possible, as far as Rotterdam. There the Jew's wife would meet her and bring the baby to him.

The scheme was considered safer than letting anybody come with the jewels in their luggage or concealed about them. There were the Customs and the spies to be feared. Whether the idea was a good one or not, it was the Jew's desire that it should be carried out, and Jack did as he was told.

Marks spied on the girl, found when she was to start, and popped into the carriage just as she came on to the platform.

Frightened at his false statement that he in-

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tended to give her into custody at Harwich, she in a moment of terror, flung the proof of her complicity in the transaction out of the window.

But when she returned to London she feared to tell the truth, and told Jack that a man whom she did not know had chloroformed her in the railway carriage and stolen the doll; and Jack always believed that he had been robbed by one of his former 'pals,' who, in the language of the profession, had 'tumbled to the dodge.'

Jack Halstead was brought up from Portland and tried, and the evidence of Marks was admitted. Em would have been charged with him, but before the trial came on she had gone to plead for mercy for her sins at the bar of a higher tribunal. Worn out with watching her dying child, and ill and half-starved herself, she caught a violent cold at its funeral. The cold struck to her lungs, and she died in the prison infirmary, listening to the message of love and forgiveness that the good chaplain bore to her bedside, and praying with her last breath that He who had mercy on the worst of sinners would let her pass to the land where her innocent baby would be waiting for her.

* * * * * *

It is a spring morning, and the sea glistens in the bright sunshine as it lazily rises and falls on the great round pebbles of Budleigh Salterton—

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the sweetest spot in all Devonshire, say those who know it and love it well.

All through the winter the roses have bloomed in the gardens of the villas that dot the heights and slopes of the romantic little place.

On a long garden-seat outside a charming little cottage that faces the sea—a cottage that has roses twining about its windows that the grandest of the villas might envy—there sits this spring morning a little family party.

There is a man in a pilot-jacket and a soft felt hat—a man with a weather-beaten, sunburnt, happy-looking face. He has a meerschaum pipe in his mouth, and he is lazily smoking it while he reads a letter again and again, as though to make sure he has not missed a word. For it is an offer of a good situation on the Great Eastern Railway, and the salary is three pounds a week, and he is to go to it directly the Devonshire holiday is over.

There is a comely matron by his side, who has slipped her arm through his, and who presently looks up into his face and says, 'How well our darling looks to-day, Luke, doesn't she?'

And then two pairs of loving eyes look in one direction together.

It is a pretty picture that attracts their attention. A fair-haired, blue-eyed little maiden is sitting in a wicker-chair a few yards from them. Her cheeks

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are rosy red with health; her eyes are bright with happiness. She has a big beautiful doll on her knee, and she is talking to it, and telling it a story she has just read in the new book papa bought her at the little library.

'And this princess, baby dear,' she says, 'whenever she spoke, diamonds and emeralds fell from her lips. Oh, how rich she must have made the people she talked to!'

Luke Elmore catches the story as the child tells it to the doll.

Then he puts his hand in his jacket pocket, and brings out a bank pass-book, and opens it at the first page for his wife to see. And she sees that there is £950 credited to 'Luke Elmore, Esq.'

'And there's the balance of the fifty I put by for Milly's winter here in my pocket-book at home, too, my dear,' says Luke. 'Ah, that princess who talked diamonds and emeralds isn't in it with our Milly's baby yonder. She didn't wait to talk to bring the jewels out. It was when she wouldn't make a sound at all that the diamonds and the rubies and things came to light, wasn't it, my dear?'

He takes his pipe from his mouth, and calls 'Milly.'

And Milly jumps up from her chair, and runs across the garden, fleet of limb and light of heart, and leaps on her father's knee, and puts her round

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white arms about his neck, and kisses him again and again.

And then she holds her doll up, and cries, 'Now a kiss for baby, father.'

And the ex-engine-driver gives the doll's waxen cheeks an honest, hearty, grateful kiss, for he says she deserves it.

Then with Milly on one knee and her baby on the other he sits and thinks how different things might have been with them but for the coming into their family circle of the doll he found across the railway line one Christmas Eve.

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FRANK REDGRAVE'S WIFE.

'WHAT'S the matter, Frank dear?'

Frank Redgrave looked at his young wife, muttered 'Oh, nothing,' and went on reading a letter which had arrived that morning from England, and had been handed to him as he sat down to breakfast in their charming sitting-room in the Hotel de Londres in Rome. The contents could not have been altogether pleasant, for as he read it the young aristocrat's handsome face grew more and more serious in its expression.

The Hon. Frank Redgrave had done a very foolish thing. Being just twenty-two, the heir to a title as old as the Conquest, and to estates of considerable magnitude, he had fallen in love with a charming girl who was governess at a ladies' school next door to the house where Frank visited a friend who crammed with an army tutor.

Frank was eighteen in those days, and Lottie Vane was a year younger. Poor Lottie's position was not a happy one, and there is no wonder that

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she surrendered herself willingly to the delicious novelty of being loved by some one. She had been sent from India to be a pupil at the school where she was then a governess. Her mother had died soon afterwards, and her father, an officer in the Indian Army, had six months later been killed in a frontier war. When his affairs were investigated it was found that his estate would not satisfy his creditors; and among the bills left unpaid was a year's account for the education, boarding, and lodging of his orphan daughter.

Lottie Vane was fourteen when she found herself in this terrible position—an orphan and penniless, and utterly at the mercy of a prim and starchy schoolmistress, who looked upon her as a bad debt.

But primness and starchiness are not always the signs of a bad heart, and Miss Morton, the lady in question, could not make up her mind to turn the poor child adrift. She saw an opportunity of making her useful. So Nellie's education was completed, and in return for her board and lodging she was expected to be housekeeper, governess, secretary, and Miss Morton's right hand generally.

The girl was grateful, and tried to do her best. She became invaluable in the school, but a thousand little things made her feel her dependent position. When the handsome young gentleman

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next door made the first shy advances, by exchanging glances and smiling at her from the window overlooking the school garden, Lottie's romantic nature was appealed to at once.

It is not given to prosaic and matter-of-fact mortals to understand these over-the-garden-wall flirtations, or to explain how they ripen into love. We only know that many are the instances on record of such a romantic beginning to a lifelong devotion.

Frank Redgrave fell over head and ears in love with the pretty young governess next door, and his passion was returned. The lynx eye of Miss Morton was cunningly defied; letters were exchanged, and—well, to make a long story short, Frank managed one or two stolen interviews, and soon had Lottie Vane's promise to be his wife.

A year afterwards, when innumerable letters had been exchanged by the connivance of a friendly housemaid, doubtless influenced by Frank's generous tips, the crisis came. It was very shocking, no doubt, but Lottie had no mother, no friend in whom she could confide, and no legal guardian. So, having no one's consent but her own to obtain when Frank said, 'Will you be my wife?' she said 'Yes,' and went out one day, ostensibly to make a small purchase, but really to be married.

She came straight back with Frank from the

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church. The young couple requested to see Miss Morton, and were shown into the drawing-room, from which they departed in half an hour on their bridal tour, leaving the unhappy schoolmistress in a state of doubt as to whether she should send for the police or have hysterics.

Frank had plenty of money. He idolized his little wife, and the sensation of liberty was to her like a new life. They went abroad, and the first fortnight was like a story out of 'The Arabian Nights' to the poor little governess.

She never thought to ask Frank anything about himself. She only knew that he was the truest, dearest, handsomest fellow in the world, and that she had never been so happy before.

Frank forgot everything in the first realization of love's young dream, and nothing happened to cloud their happiness until the receipt of the letter over which Frank sat poring in the coffee-room of the great hotel in Rome.

Lottie watched her husband's face grow darker and darker as he read.

'What is it, darling?' she asked him, as he folded it and put it in his pocket with a sigh.

'Nothing, my dear,' he answered gravely; 'nothing particular. I wrote to my mother a week ago telling her of our marriage, and this is her answer.'

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'Oh, Frank!' cried Lottie, 'it must be a very cruel answer to make you look so miserable.'

'My mother is a proud woman,' he said gently. 'She and my father wished me to marry some one else. They do not know you, and fancy you are some adventuress who has entrapped me.'

He did not mean to say it. He was distraught, and the words escaped him.

'An adventuress who has entrapped you!' said Lottie, repeating the words slowly, as if to gather their full force. 'Oh, Frank, how wicked—how cruel!'

They were up in their own room now.

'Don't mind what they say, my pet,' he whispered, coming to where the girl sat, and putting his arm round her waist. 'I know what a good noble little heart I have won, and no one shall come between us and our love.'

They were but boy and girl in the first fortnight of a fool's paradise. Her husband's reassuring words and a kiss brought the sunshine back to the young bride's face; and an hour later, as they drove through the famous city, gazing, like children out for a holiday, at the world-famous sights, the disturbing letter was forgotten.

In the afternoon Frank asked his wife to leave him alone in the sitting-room for an hour while he composed a letter to his mother.

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He was not great at letter-writing, and this was important, and he felt that he must be alone to accomplish his task successfully.

Lottie went down for an hour into the ladies' drawing-room. There she found the English newspapers, and reading them through, she forgot how the time was slipping away.

She looked at the clock on the mantelpiece, and saw she had been away an hour and a half.

'Frank will have finished his letter by this time,' she said to herself; 'we can go out for an hour.'

She went lightly up the stairs till she came to the door of the sitting-room.

She stopped outside, astonished.

She could hear her husband's voice; it was raised angrily. With whom could he be talking?

'You wrong her,' he said; 'she is no adventuress! She is my wife, and I forbid you to say a word against her.'

A woman's voice answered him:

'Frank, this will break your father's heart, as it has broken mine. We hoped it was at the worst some boyish escapade; but to have married this governess girl, to have given her a title which the best-born woman in the land might have been proud to wear—Frank, it is horrible!'

Lottie knew then that it was Frank's mother speaking. She would have gone in and pleaded for

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Frank, but her courage forsook her. This haughty mother frightened her. She began to feel she had done something very dreadful. She would not go into the room, but she would not go away. Something fascinated her, and she stood where she was, and heard a passionate quarrel between the mother and son about herself.

Lady Redgrave, after writing the letter to her son, had followed it. She had some idea that at least the scandal might be spared the family of having this young person publicly acknowledged. She had some vague wild notion that even now matters might be arranged. And when she found that her last hope was gone, her pent-up passion and mortification found vent in a torrent of reproaches.

Poor trembling Lottie heard it all. She heard herself painted in the worst of colours; she heard a powerful description given of Frank's aged father at home heart-broken at his son's conduct; she heard mother and son quarrel fiercely, and the son vow that he would see his mother's face no more—and all through her—all through her.

It was then that, with a violent effort, Lottie tore herself from the spot, and, rushing upstairs to her room, flung herself on her knees by the bedside, and sobbed as though her heart would break.

This, then, was the end of her short dream of

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happiness! She had brought misery to her husband's family. His father's heart was breaking—he had forfeited his mother's love—and all for her. She wished she was back at Mrs. Morton's. She was only a drudge there—something kept out of charity, and looked down on—but she didn't make anyone miserable. She had never wrecked anybody's life there. Gradually she grew calmer. Her husband should not see she had been crying, nor should his mother. She bathed her eyes and smoothed her hair. She would go down, and tell this lady who thought her so wicked that she was not the heartless designing girl she imagined. She would offer to go away. No one should ever know she was Frank's wife.

She removed the traces of her agitation, and when she was quite calm she went downstairs; but her heart beat, oh, so quickly, and something would come in her throat that nearly choked her.

She opened the sitting-room door, and went in.

Frank was alone!

He was sitting on the sofa, his face buried in his hands.

He looked up at the sound of her footsteps, and spoke with an evident effort.

'You've been a long time,' he said; 'where have you been?'

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She hesitated. Should she tell him? No; she would wait till he said something to her.

He said a good deal. He talked at random, but he never mentioned his mother's visit.

Presently he got up and looked out of the window.

'I'm a bit upset over writing this letter, Lottie,' he said; 'I'll go out and have a cigar, and think what I shall say.'

He stooped down and kissed her, and went out.

'He does not mean to tell me,' she thought. 'Poor Frank!' She went to the window and watched him leave the hotel. Then she sat down, and thought over all that had happened, and wondered what she could do.

There was a knock at the door, and the English waiter came in.

'I beg pardon, madam; but a lady desires to know if she can see you a moment?'

Lottie guessed in a moment who it was. She said: 'Yes; she would see the lady.' At least Frank's mother should hear her story.

The waiter returned in a few moments, and ushered in a handsome grey-haired lady. Lottie knew it was Frank's mother directly she looked at her face.

It was a cruel interview for the young wife.

Lady Redgrave was polite, but merciless. In

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sharp cutting words, every one of which pierced the young bride's heart, Frank's mother told her as plainly as she could what misery this *mésalliance* had caused.

'You are cruel,' sobbed Lottie, breaking down; 'indeed, indeed I did not know you would all hate me so!'

But at last the girl's proud spirit rebelled against the unjust taunts and accusations of Frank's mother.

'Madam,' she cried, 'I am your son's wife; you have no right to speak to me like this—you shall not! This is my room—leave it!'

Lady Redgrave stared haughtily at the daring girl a moment, then bowed, and walked to the door.

'You are insolent,' she said, turning in the doorway. 'I might have expected it. You have played your cards well. You have won a rich prize, and what does it matter to you that you have marred your dupe's whole future life, and separated him from those who loved him? My son will see his folly soon enough, and then he will hate you as I do!'

The proud woman, merciless in the passion which had blinded her to everything else, almost hissed the last words as she closed the door.

Lottie did not cry any more. She began to think

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that it must be true that she had blighted Frank's life, made his father and mother wretched, and that in time he would come to hate her.

Lady Redgrave idolized her son, and was not at heart a cruel woman; but she so fully believed that her boy had been the dupe of a designing girl, that she never paused to think what a cruel injustice she might be doing in thus upbraiding Frank's innocent wife.

Frank came in from his walk later on. His manner, Lottie thought, was strangely cold. Was he already repenting the rash step he had taken? The thought never crossed his mind that his mother had seen his wife. He believed that she had left the hotel after her interview with him, and would go back to London at once.

Lottie kept her secret, and Frank kept his. Both were silent and absorbed at dinner; but Frank was glad to be quiet, and took no notice of his wife's sudden seriousness.

That evening they had secured seats for a gala performance at one of the theatres. They went; but Frank was ill at ease, and could not fix his mind on the stage. After the first act he got up and took his hat.

'I shall go and smoke a cigarette outside,' he said; 'I shan't be long.'

He strolled away from the theatre, hardly know-

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ing whither he went. He was worried, and it did him good to saunter along and smoke.

Presently he remembered what he was doing.

'By Jove! I must go back,' he thought; 'Lottie will be getting nervous.'

He had been sauntering some twenty minutes, and had got some distance from the theatre. As he went back some people passed him running, and men, and women, and boys began to pour out into the streets, all hurrying and shouting. He wondered what could be the matter.

Presently he heard two men passing him speak in English.

'What is it?' he asked.

'The theatre's on fire!' was the answer.

Great God! his wife was in the theatre alone—unprotected!

He ran like a madman. Hundreds were running with him, and the streets were choked with people. He fought his way nearer and nearer; he could see the flames shooting up into the sky; he could hear the hoarse roar of the multitude, the screams of women, and the shouts of the soldiers and the police. The great building was a mass of flames. The cry ran round that hundreds were in the building unable to escape.

'My wife!' he cried. 'Let me through! My wife is there!'

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But the crowd forced him back. He gave one mad, wild plunge to break down the human wall, and then his strength failed him. There was a surge backwards, as the mounted soldiers drove the people out of the way of the officials, who were shrieking and gesticulating and raving, and doing little else; and in that surge Frank Redgrave was swept down.

He felt a dozen heavy heels striking and bruising his prostrate body, and then he felt no more.

* * * * * *

'Now then—move on there!'

The big policeman who bent over something dark huddled up in a corner of one of the recesses of Waterloo Bridge spoke firmly, but not unkindly.

It was Christmas night, and the guardian of the peace, who had only come on duty at ten, had passed a remarkably pleasant day in the bosom of his family. The spirit of the season of goodwill and good cheer was upon him.

'Come, missus,' he said, giving the bundle another shake, 'it's getting late, you. Come, get away home!'

The bundle moved. A white haggard face—the face of a woman still young, and with the traces of beauty not obliterated from it—turned slowly to the light, and the good-hearted policeman took a step backward.

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He had expected to see the gin-sodden face of an outcast; he had expected to hear the harsh, broken voice of the habitual loafer give forth the usual volley of drunken oaths.

'Home!' said the woman, in a quiet voice; 'yes, yes—I'll go home.'

She rose slowly from the stone seat, gathered her worn, thin shawl closely about her; she made a step or two forward, then reeled, and would have fallen, but the policeman, who had gradually recovered from his astonishment, stretched out his arms and caught her.

'Poor lass!' he murmured, as he looked at the pallid face and the hollow cheeks, made more ghastly still by the light that streamed upon them from a neighbouring lamp. 'She ain't a reg'lar.'

Then, letting her sink back until she rested against the stone coping, he took her hand and looked at the fingers.

'No wedding-ring,' he said, thinking aloud. 'Ah! the old story.'

The woman, whose eyes had closed in momentary faintness, opened them again. She had heard the man's remark.

'I am better now,' she said; 'I—I will go home. Lottie!—where's Lottie?'

The woman looked about as if in search of some one.

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'Got some one with you, eh?' said the policeman. 'Who is it?'

'My little girl,' answered the woman; 'she was here just now. She will see me home.'

The policeman looked about. He could see no one. The bridge was deserted. It was Christmas night, and only policemen and outcasts were wandering the streets.

The policeman shaded his eyes and looked along the bridge. He was just making up his mind that the woman was light-headed and a prey to delusions, when he caught sight of something coming along swiftly from the Surrey side.

In a moment the something was by the woman's side, and clutching her by her dress eagerly.

The something was a girl of five—a small white-faced little thing, in a threadbare frock, with, oh, such terrible boots!

The policeman looked at the boots and the frock, and then he looked at the child's face.

He was in for surprises that night. If he had been astonished at the mother, he was petrified at the appearance of the child. It was the face of an angel in a Christmas picture—a face surrounded by a wealth of auburn hair—hair blown about by the night wind; but lovelier still in the picturesque confusion in which it fell about the child's shoulders.

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'Look, mammy, look!' cried the child eagerly. 'See what a kind gentleman's given me.'

The child held something up in her fingers. It was a shilling.

The woman looked at it a moment, then burst into tears.

'God has been merciful,' she sobbed; 'we shall not die in the streets to-night.'

'Die in the streets!' exclaimed the policeman. 'Here, that ain't allowed, you know.'

The child crept up to where her mother sat, and putting her little arms round her neck, drew the white face down to hers and kissed it.

'Come along, mammy,' she said; 'now we've got some money, p'r'aps they'll let us in again.'

'Yes, come, darling; I'm stronger now,' murmured the woman. 'Let us go.'

She rose, and, taking the child's hand, moved slowly along the bridge towards the Strand.

The policeman stood and watched them a moment. 'Poor critters!' he said to himself; 'hanged if I can let 'em go without knowing more about 'em! There's something out of the common, or I don't know wirtue when I see it. Hi, missus!'

The woman turned, and the policeman came up to her.

'I'm a family man, missus,' he said gently, 'and I've got a wife and kids o' my own, so p'r'aps you

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won't mind me askin' ye where ye live, and 'ow ye come to talk about dyin' in the streets on Christmas night.'

The woman hesitated a moment, then something in the policeman's kindly face reassured her.

'I've been very ill, lately. I have earned nothing. This morning we were turned out of the poor little room where we live. We hadn't the rent. They would have turned us out last night, but the man was merciful.'

She might with more truth have said the deputy was drunk, and forgot his duties.

'Where do you live?'

The woman told him. It was a common lodging-house in a West-end slum—a wretched den, where the poorest of the poor lodge by the day, and where the rents are collected on the fixed principle of 'No money, out you go.'

'What do you pay?'

'Eightpence a night.'

'And you've got a shilling. That don't leave much for to-morrow's dinner.'

The man fumbled in his pocket a moment, and drew out half-a-crown.

'Here, missus; I ain't often took like this, but I've had some good tips this Christmas, helpin' gents up to their front-doors, and that sort of thing. You can give it me next time I see you.'

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The policeman pushed the half-crown into the woman's hand, and, before she could recover from her astonishment, had shuffled off, blushing to the roots of his hair, and feeling almost ashamed of himself.

The tears sprang into the woman's eyes. She was thankful, and yet the charity of the kindly policeman only brought home to her more vividly than ever the utter misery into which she had sunk.

She watched the policeman till he was out of sight, half inclined to run after him and give him his money back; then, taking her child's hand, made her way as fast as her weak limbs would carry her across the bridge.

A long walk lay before the weary woman and her little child, but there was shelter at the end of the journey. She had the money to pay for the bare walls which would hide her misery from the world, and she could throw herself down in the wretched den, and, with her child in her arms, sleep, and, for a little while, forget.

So, through the deserted streets, making their way to the low lodging-house at the West-end, went mother and child that Christmas night.

* * * * * *

It was Christmas night in a great house at the West. Midnight had struck, but in the neighbour-

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ing houses the windows were bright with many lights, and the sound of music and song, and of merry laughter, floated now and again across the night.

In the great mansions of the West, as in the lowlier dwellings of the poor, the honoured customs of Yuletide were kept, and the season of gladness found its echo in many a jaded heart.

But in one great house silence reigned. No music, no laughter, echoed through the gloomy rooms; and in all save one the lights were out.

Frank Redgrave—Lord Redgrave now, for his father had been dead a year—sat in the great dining-room looking into the glowing embers of the fire, his thoughts far away. His mother, her handsome face a reflex of the sadness upon her son's, sat opposite to him, but neither spoke. He had been spending the Christmas Day with her, but it had been a gloomy affair. Both felt that the Christmas wish their lips had uttered in the morning had been a hollow mockery.

A merry Christmas!

'Merry!' The great sorrow of Frank Redgrave's life had been the death of his young wife. He had been rescued from the heels of the mob to be for days unconscious, to recover and learn that among the charred and mutilated bodies burnt beyond all recognition on the night of the fearful fire must

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have been that of his young bride. He had left her in the theatre, and she had never been seen since. Many of the corpses were unrecognisable. His poor wife was among them.

To the terrible agony which followed this discovery was added another. His mother, who came to nurse him, her heart relenting, sobbed out the cruel story of that last interview.

His young wife had perished, believing that she had marred his life, with his mother's harsh words, perhaps, ringing in her dying ears.

'Mother!' he cried, as the haughty woman wept beside him, 'I will forgive—I can never forget.'

The years had come and gone, but Frank Redgrave had not forgotten. His boyish love had been sincere. He had given his whole heart, and his sorrow would be lifelong.

It was nearly six years this Christmas Day since his poor lost darling died that fearful death, and yet it seemed to him as but yesterday.

As mother and son sat by the fire in the great dining-room the thoughts of each were drifting to the same goal.

Frank broke the silence first.

'Mother,' he said, 'do you never think how different things might have been had she lived? You would have come to love her in time as I did—to

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know what a true, noble-hearted girl she was—how worthy to be your daughter.'

Lady Redgrave answered her son gently; it did him good to talk of the lost one, and she encouraged him, though often his words wrung her heart.

They talked on—he pictured her in his fancy there. Perhaps—who knows?—there might have been a little child with them to put up its baby face and kiss grandmamma.

'But that can never be now!' he sighed. 'Oh, mother! mother! I'd give all the wealth, all the blessings which are mine, and which hundreds would envy, to have my poor darling sitting opposite me to-night!'

Lady Redgrave watched her son anxiously. His constant nervous fits of melancholy troubled her. She idolized her son—he was all she had left in the world to care for.

Suddenly she lifted her head.

'What was that?' she said. 'Did you hear it, Frank? It sounded like a child's voice.'

Frank Redgrave listened. There was a child sobbing. The sound came from the steps outside. Presently the child spoke. The streets were silent, and every word could be heard.

'Oh, mammy! mammy! don't—don't look like

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that! Mammy, get up! I'll take you home. Come, mammy—do come!'

There was a groan, and then dead silence.

Lady Redgrave rose.

'It's some poor creature outside, Frank,' she said. 'She may be ill—perhaps dying. I'll ring the bell, and tell Parker to see what it is.'

The footman came upstairs slowly from the servants' hall in answer to his mistress's ringing. The punch downstairs was excellent, but it was disappearing rapidly, and he was loath to leave it.

'Open the front-door, and see who is on the steps,' said his mistress.

'On the front steps, my lady? Certainly.'

Parker went to the door, wondering who could have 'the dratted imperence' to be on the doorstep on Christmas night.

He opened the door, and a child darted into the hall. She was a child with a lovely face, auburn hair hanging over her shoulders, and a tattered frock. That's all Parker saw; and he exclaimed:

''Ere! what d'yer want? 'Ere, come back!'

But the child had seen Lady Redgrave standing at the open dining-room door. She darted forward, and clutched at her skirts.

'Oh, lady! lady!' she cried, 'mammy's ill! She's there—she can't walk any more! Oh, lady! lady! she'll die! she'll die!'

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'Poor creature!' cried Lady Redgrave. 'How shocking! Parker, see what it is.'

'Yes, my lady.'

Parker went outside very reluctantly. It was cold, and he expected to find somebody drunk on the doorstep.

'P'r'aps, my lady, you'd better shut the door,' he exclaimed obsequiously, 'as sometimes their langwidge when disturbed sudden on a doorstep is howdashus.'

Frank Redgrave had risen and come out with his mother. He looked at the child; then, pushing the footman aside, went on to the doorstep.

'It's a woman—she is ill!' he exclaimed. 'Help me to carry her into the hall.'

'Hadn't we better send for the police, my lord?'

'Do as I tell you.'

Parker, finding further remonstrances useless, gave way. Lifting the prostrate woman tenderly, Lord Redgrave helped to carry her into the hall.

The child knelt down beside her.

'Oh, mammy, speak to me!' she cried—'mammy!'

The dining-room door was open. The light streamed down upon the senseless woman. The child drew the face round, and then Lord Redgrave uttered a wild cry.

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'Lottie! Great God! mother! she has come back from the dead! It is Lottie!'

Lady Redgrave ran to her son. She thought he had taken leave of his senses, but one glance at the prostrate woman's face told her all.

Her interview with her son's wife and all that followed had indelibly impressed the features of that face upon her memory.

The poor starved outcast lying on the floor of Lord Redgrave's hall was Lord Redgrave's wife.

* * * * * *

In the early days of Lottie's recovery her story was told—told while tears stood in the eyes of the woman who had treated her so cruelly once.

Lottie had been in the theatre, and had escaped. Then the wild thought came to her that she might free Frank of his burthen, and the family of one who, they believed, had so cruelly wronged them. She knew that if she was missed her death would be believed in. She sold her jewels, and with the money came to England.

Then in due course her child was born. But her health failed her gradually, and she could no longer teach or sew, and so she and her child drifted lower and lower, until they came to be penniless and homeless on Waterloo Bridge on Christmas night.

Toiling along to the lodging-house, Lottie's feeble

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strength had failed her, and she had sunk down exhausted on her husband's steps. And that is how Lord Redgrave, who had mourned his life as lonely evermore, had found a wife he thought dead years ago, and a child of whose existence he knew nothing.

The next Christmas Day in that great house there was no silence. The music and laughter were as loud there as anywhere, and bright and clear over it all rang the childish accents of little Lottie, as she sat on her grandmother's knee and pulled the funny caps that came out of the crackers over her long auburn hair.

* * * * * *

The night policeman on Waterloo Bridge is changed. The man who used to be on that duty has a greengrocery business, and is doing well. He had two hundred pounds to start with. It was given him by a gentleman who asked him if he remembered giving a poor woman half-a-crown.

I trust his good fortune may not tempt the members of the force to cast their bread upon the waters too lavishly.

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TOLD IN THE TUNNEL.

We had been in the tunnel half an hour!

It was Christmas Eve and getting on for midnight, and I was exceedingly anxious to get home; so that, after making due allowance for the delays and break-downs incidental to Christmas travel, I felt that the situation ought to be argued out.

I put my head out of the window of the first-class compartment of which I was the sole occupant, and I shouted to the guard:

'Guard, are we going to stay here all night?'

The guard came along the line, and, standing on the carriage-step, touched his hat and informed me that the probability was we should not be able to proceed until the morning, for the tunnel had fallen in behind us and there was a heavy goods'-train off the line just in front of us, and the piston-rod of our own engine was broken.

'Under these circumstances, sir,' said the guard, 'the best thing you can do is to get a good night's rest. I'll call you at eight o'clock to-morrow morn-

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ing, and bring you some warm water, and if you'll put your boots outside, I'll see that they are cleaned.'

I thanked the man, and told him that I would not trouble him, as my boots were patent-leather, and required to be cleaned with a special kind of varnish, which I feared he did not carry.

I then curled myself up in my rugs, and, wondering if they would sit up for me at home, and if they would be fidgety, I tried to settle myself to sleep.

Just as I was dropping off, I was aroused by a gentle tapping at the window-glass.

I let it down, and peered out into the darkness.

'Excuse me,' said a voice, 'but I am all alone in the next compartment. Would you allow me to join you? It will be company, and we can converse and make the night pass more pleasantly.'

I consented at once, opened the door, and the owner of the voice stepped in.

As he did so, the light of the lamp in the compartment fell full upon his face. I started—the features were familiar to me.

'I beg your pardon,' I exclaimed, as the newcomer settled himself in a corner seat. 'Your face seems familiar to me. I fancy I've seen you before.'

The gentleman looked at me earnestly, then

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coloured to his forehead and laughed a little awkwardly.

'You—er—live in Gower Street, I think,' he said.

'Yes; I do.'

'Then that is where you have seen me. I used to stand at the corner of Store Street a year ago. I was one of those poor ragged fellows who hang about to fetch cabs and to lift the luggage off. Cab-touts they are called.'

I looked at the well-dressed gentlemanly man before me—a man of about five-and-thirty, with a pleasant aristocratic face—a man whose bearing and manner bespoke the utmost refinement, and I shook my head.

'Impossible, my dear sir,' I exclaimed; 'I really can't believe it.'

'But I assure you it is true,' replied my companion; 'and, if you will allow me, I will tell you my story.'

'By all means; it will be the revival of a good old custom—a traveller's tale told on Christmas Eve; only we ought to be snowed up in order to conform to the old-fashioned regulations.'

'We are not snowed up,' replied my fellow-traveller, with a smile; 'but we are quite as effectually interrupted in our journey. And my story is a Christmas story, in every sense of the words.'

'Bravo!' I exclaimed; 'a Christmas Story told in

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a Tunnel on Christmas Eve—nothing could be better.'

The gentleman, thus encouraged, took a long pull at a silver brandy-flask, which he drew from his ulster-pocket, and then, with a little preliminary cough, commenced.

I.

THE CAB-TOUT'S CHRISTMAS STORY.

My name is Felix Janaway. I am descended from a very old and very famous family, the Janaways of Worcestershire. My grandfather gambled and dissipated away the whole of the family estates; my father died in a debtor's prison; and I was left an orphan, at the age of ten, to do as best I could. Thanks to my excellent mother, who, when my father married her, was a governess, I had received a good education; but, alas! she died a month before my father. So that I was alone in the world.

I am naturally of an energetic disposition, and, after the bitterness of my grief had abated, I set to work to find a situation. I obtained one as errand-boy in a merchant's office in Gracechurch Street. Here I rose gradually until I was a clerk, with a salary of £150 a year.

By the time I was two-and-twenty, I had made

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still further progress, and was cashier, with a salary of £300.

Then I married, and all went well until five years ago, when, in an evil hour, I was induced to try my luck on the Stock Exchange. The gambling instinct was in my veins. I inherited it from my grandfather and from my father. I made a little money over my first venture, and this encouraged me to go on. It is the old story. At the end of twelve months I was ruined. My home had been broken up; I was heavily in debt, and trouble and anxiety caused me to be careless in my legitimate business. At last a blunder of mine cost my governor a thousand pounds, and I was discharged.

Failing to find another situation at once, I took to drink in order to drown my remorse; and then I began to sink lower and lower, to be shunned by all my former associates, and at last, to support my wife and my two poor little children, I had to hang about and get odd jobs where I could.

We lived in one wretched room. Lived? We starved, I should say, for it was a good week for me if I picked up ten shillings.

It was when I was a cab-tout at the corner of Store Street that you must have seen me—in fact, now I look at you, I remember getting your luggage off a four-wheeler, one afternoon; you gave me sixpence.

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Well, to come to the interesting part of my story, I continued earning a precarious income as a cab-tout up to last Christmas Day, and then something happened which was the turning-point in my career.

At that moment the story was interrupted. There came suddenly a loud knocking at the window of our compartment. I jumped up and looked out.

An elderly gentleman was standing on the line. He had knocked at the window with his walking-stick.

'Excuse me, sir,' said the elderly gentleman, 'but can you tell me if you have a Mr. Janaway in your compartment?'

My fellow-traveller jumped up in a moment—opened the door, and was out on the line in a second. He grasped the elderly gentleman's hand cordially, and exclaimed, 'Why, bless me, Baron, whatever are you doing here? I didn't know you were in the train!'

'Nor did *I* know that *you* were,' replied the Baron, 'until I went into the guard's van to open my trunk and get my slippers out, and there I saw a box with your name on it. I immediately knocked at every compartment to inquire for you, and now I've found you.'

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'Come in, come in, my dear Baron,' cried Mr. Janaway. 'I am just telling this gentleman the story of my adventure last Christmas Day. I have just got to the point where *your* adventure comes in.'

'Ah,' said the Baron, 'is that so?—then let me tell that portion myself. It will help to make the time that we are imprisoned in this dreadful tunnel pass pleasantly.'

The Baron and Mr. Janaway got into my compartment, and Janaway introduced his friend.

'This is my partner, Baron Grafheimer, the great financier—you have heard of him?'

I rose and bowed.

'The fame of the eminent financiers, Grafheimer and Co., of Lombard Street, is European,' I said.

Both gentlemen acknowledged the compliment, and then the Baron, after a few words with his partner, took up the story.

II.

THE GREAT FINANCIER'S CHRISTMAS STORY.

Last Christmas is a year ago, is it not?—a year all but a day, for this is Christmas Eve. Last Christmas Eve there happened to me something

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which I shall remember all my life. In the morning, at my place of business, there had been entrusted to my care the largest diamond in the world. It was larger than the Koh-i-noor, and as perfect. It was the property of an Indian prince who was visiting London for pleasure, and having been disappointed in a remittance, required some money to go on with. On the security of the diamond I advanced him £100,000. Wishing to show the marvellous stone to my wife, I put it carefully in my waistcoat-pocket, and took it home with me to Bedford Square, where I lived.

I am a German, but I speak English fluently, as you hear. My wife is an English lady, and we have all your English customs in our house. My wife makes her own mincemeat and her own plum-puddings. When I got home that afternoon I showed my wife the diamond larger than the Koh-i-noor, but she paid very little attention to it, for she was just finishing making the Christmas pudding, according to an old fashion in her family, which was to make it on the Christmas Eve, let every member of the family stir it for luck, and then to put it in the copper to boil for twelve hours. My wife always boiled hers from six o'clock on Christmas Eve to six o'clock on Christmas morning, which is a good old-fashioned plan, and, I assure you, makes a most excellent

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pudding. Of course you boil it again for an hour before it is required to be served up for dinner.

This, however, is a detail. Let me return to the diamond. I put it back in my waistcoat-pocket after showing it to my wife, and then I went downstairs to the kitchen with the children, and we all had a stir at the pudding while it was in the basin. Then it was tied up in a bag and placed with much ceremony in the copper, where we left it to the care of the cook, with many injunctions not to let it stop boiling, because directly the water stops boiling the pudding is spoilt.

I passed a pleasant evening in the bosom of my family, and we retired early to rest.

The next morning all was excitement, for the children were in the seventh heaven of delight with the numerous gifts which Santa Klaus had brought them.

All went well until dinner-time. We dined in the middle of the day, that the children might dine with us. We had a turkey and some roast-beef, and presently the plum-pudding and mince-pies came upon the table.

At that moment I put my hand in my waistcoat-pocket, remembering I had the diamond there. It was a sudden fancy that came upon me to look at it.

I uttered a cry of horror.

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The diamond was not there!

I felt in every pocket. I jumped about like a madman, and shook myself. I rushed upstairs and turned the bedroom upside down. No diamond! I am a passionate man, and I flew into a fearful rage. I was annoyed with myself, I was annoyed with everybody. I had lost the diamond, and I was panic-stricken, for it meant not only the loss of a fortune, but of that which no money could replace.

When I came down into the dining-room again, my wife, in her cool, calm, English way, exclaimed, 'Never mind about the diamond now, Heinrich; sit down, and have your Christmas pudding.'

Her coolness maddened me.

'Christmas pudding be ——!' I exclaimed, and then, with a cry of fury, I seized the smoking delicacy and hurled it across the room. It struck the window, broke the glass, and went whizzing out into Bedford Square!

My wife burst into tears, and rushed upstairs into her room. My children exclaimed, 'Oh, papa! the beautiful pudding!' and then they set up a wild howl of grief.

I glanced at the broken window, at the desecrated dinner-table, at my children's tearful faces, at my wife's empty chair, at the dish on which the brandy was blazing round a vacant space, and then I beat my head and cried, 'I am a brute—I am a madman

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—the diamond will be found, of course; but the pudding is gone.'

'Perhaps, papa,' sobbed my eldest boy, 'it's lying on the pavement—may I go out and see?'

'No! I will go myself.'

I rushed to the door and opened it, and gazed out into the street.

There was no sign of the pudding anywhere. It had gone! I returned to the dining-room, and, flinging myself on the sofa, I groaned aloud.

And the children consoled themselves by eating all the mince-pies.

The great financier paused to take breath, and was about to continue when his partner stopped him with a polite gesture.

'Allow me,' said the partner, 'to continue the story from this point.'

III.

CONTINUATION OF THE CAB-TOUT'S STORY.

It was Christmas morning, Christmas morning in the wretched garret where I lived with my wife and two children, Harold Thomas and Maud Eliza. I had earned very little more than the rent during the week, and my poor little ones had that white, hungry look which the famished children of London

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toilers too often wear. My brave, good wife, who never once, amid all our trouble and privation, lost her courage, had managed to make even the dilapidated garret look a little Christmassy. She had begged a sprig or two of holly and one little bit of mistletoe from a kindly-hearted greengrocer, but, alas! the fare in our larder was anything but Christmassy. We had dry bread for our breakfasts, and not too much of that. Mine almost choked me, and the big tears came into my eyes as I thought of the happy Christmases of long ago, and of the wretched fate I had brought upon my brave wife and gentle little children by my own mad folly.

Harold Thomas was old enough to remember the bygone glories of our happier Christmas-days, and he was telling Maud Eliza about Santa Klaus, and Christmas-trees, and plum-puddings, and my poor little pet opened her blue eyes wide in wonder at her elder brother's descriptions.

'Oh, mamma,' she said, when Harold Thomas paused to take a big bite at his slice of bread, 'how I do wish we could have a plum-pudding to-day for dinner!'

'Some day, my darling, but not to-day,' said her mother kindly. 'When dear papa's ship comes home again, then we will have plum-puddings.'

'Every day?' exclaimed Maud Eliza.

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'No, you goose!' replied Harold Thomas; 'that would not be proper. It is wicked to eat Christmas pudding except on Christmas Day, is it not, mamma?'

My poor wife sighed. She was thinking of the old days before our poverty became so terrible, and I, unable to listen without a heartache to my children's innocent prattle concerning the Christmas joys that were not for us, put on my battered hat, and went out in the hope of picking up a few coppers. I determined, if I were lucky enough to earn sixpence, that I would go to a coffee-shop and buy some Christmas pudding and bring it home to my little ones.

* * * * * *

I had been out all the morning, and I had earned nothing.

Cabs came and went, but never a cab with any luggage on it. If there is a heavy box or portmanteau to be lifted up or down, the cabman offers no objection to the cab-tout's presence. The cabman is willing that his own arms shall be spared the strain of porterage. But when there is no luggage, the ragged wretch who hopes to earn a copper by opening or shutting the cab-door is told to 'hook it out of that.' I had spent the morning in 'hooking it out of that;' and two o'clock found me leaning disconsolately against a lamp-post, my

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hands thrust deeply into my empty pockets, and my mind a prey to the blackest despair.

I would not go home empty-handed. I had set my mind on taking the children some Christmas pudding, if it was only a penny slice. I thought if I waited on till three or four, some of the dinner guests might begin to arrive at the great houses in Bedford Square, and I might earn a copper or two yet.

At three o'clock I took up my position in Bedford Square, and watched eagerly for cabs; but no cabs came.

At half-past three I was standing on the kerb opposite No. —, and I was buried in meditation.

'Oh,' I said to myself, 'if only I could have a Christmas pudding to take home with me!' Then I exclaimed aloud, 'Oh for a Christmas pudding!' and at that very moment I heard a crash of glass, and the next instant a Christmas pudding struck me full in the chest and almost knocked the breath out of my body.

Instinctively I flung up my arms, and caught the pudding before it fell to the ground. Then, almost doubting my senses, I gave a little cry of delight and rushed off like a madman towards my humble home, clasping the Heaven-sent pudding in my arms.

I shall never forget the children's joy when they

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beheld me. My wife could scarcely believe her eyes. Harold Thomas and Maud Eliza sent up a wild scream of delight as I tenderly placed the Christmas pudding on the table and exclaimed, 'See, my darlings, Heaven has answered my prayer!'

'Stop!' exclaimed the great financier, as the ex-cab-tout reached this point. 'Let the joy of that Christmas dinner be sacred. I will take up the story from this point.'

IV.

CONTINUATION OF THE GREAT FINANCIER'S CHRISTMAS STORY.

It was a miserable Christmas night in my home. The loss of the priceless diamond had filled me with despair, the loss of the Christmas pudding had damped the children's joy, the loss of my temper had made my good wife disagreeable for the rest of the day.

All that evening I rummaged the house from top to bottom to find the diamond, but in vain. All that night I never closed my eyes. The next morning early I rushed off to the printer and dragged him out of bed, and insisted upon his

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driving about with me in my carriage in search of enough of his men to set up a handbill and strike off ten thousand copies. This was the handbill:

LOST.

A large piece of glass.

Looks like a diamond, but is not one.

Valuable only as a heirloom.

Anyone bringing the same to No. —,

Bedford Square, will receive

£1000 *REWARD.*

I feared to advertise it as a real diamond, lest the finder should try to dispose of it for £100,000, instead of coming to me. I felt sure that it was not in the house, and I remembered that I had gone to the pillar-box at the corner of the square late on Christmas Eve. That was where I must have dropped it.

The handbill was duly printed, a hundred men were told off to distribute them, and then I returned to Bedford Square and lay down upon the sofa in my study, a prey to the most agonizing emotions.

It was about half-past five, and I was having a cup of tea for my headache, when the servant announced that a ragged man wished to see me.

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'Show him in,' I cried eagerly.

I felt that this ragged man brought news of the great diamond.

It was our friend opposite who came in. He was not such a swell as he is now, and he hadn't such a rosy colour. He led by the hand an interesting little boy, who was ragged also, but scrupulously clean.

'Sir,' said the ragged man, 'I have seen your handbill.'

'And you have found the diamond?' I exclaimed with joy.

'Wait a moment, sir,' replied the ragged man, 'and I will tell you all. This is my son, Harold Thomas. Yesterday he was eating some Christmas pudding, when we heard a scrunch and a cry of pain. He had bitten on something in the pudding, and it had broken his front tooth—a permanent disfigurement, for his second teeth have all come. Show the gap, Harold Thomas.'

'Bother the gap!' I exclaimed. 'Go on! go on! What did he bite in the pudding?'

'This bit of glass, sir!' said the ragged man.

He held out his hand. In it lay the priceless diamond. I snatched it from him. Then I fell upon his breast and wept, and then I waltzed him round the room, singing and crying and laughing; and finally I went down on all-fours and barked at

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Harold Thomas like a dog. The joy had turned my brain.

When I recovered my senses the ragged man was still in the room. He was waiting for the £1000. I drew the cheque and presented it to him, making it guineas, and telling him to give the odd shillings to Harold Thomas, for the loss of his tooth.

Before going, the man told me the story of his life, and gave me a specimen of his handwriting and his arithmetic. I saw at once he was the man I wanted, and I offered him the position of head clerk in my office, in the place of a gentleman who had just left to go upon the stage.

From that moment everything prospered with him. In six months he had proved himself so valuable that I took him into partnership, and he is now the Co. to my Grafheimer, and between us we make an income which, as the Income Tax Commissioners are not about, reaches, I may tell you, the splendid total of £50,000 a year.

'And,' said the ex-cab-tout, chiming in, 'we intend to keep the money in the family. It is our dearest wish that in the future Harold Thomas may marry Miss Grafheimer, and that Master Grafheimer may lead to the hymeneal altar my daughter, Maud Eliza.'

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V.

MY CHRISTMAS STORY.

'And so,' I said, 'this happy state of affairs is entirely due to the accidental catching of a Christmas pudding by a cab-tout—which pudding had been stirred for luck by a great financier with a second Koh-i-noor in his waistcoat-pocket!'

'That is so,' said the wealthy partners, with a smile.

'Then, gentlemen, if I may do so without violating family secrets, I should like to make the history of your partnership the subject of a Christmas Story.'

Both gentlemen gave their consent, and presently we all fell asleep. When we awoke in the morning the train was moving. The break-down gang had liberated us during the night. At nine a.m. we were steaming into Euston Station. At nine five we were on the platform fighting for our luggage and hailing cabs. We parted with many handshakes, and each drove off to the bosom of his family, where he was anxiously expected.

I never go past Store Street where the cab-touts wait, and I never go round Bedford Square, without recalling the wonderful story of a diamond, a Christmas pudding, a cab-tout, and a great financier, which, one Christmas Eve, was 'Told in the Tunnel.'

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THE MOUNTED PATROL.

PROLOGUE.

My name is, or rather was, Tom Montressor, the Hon. Tom Montressor. The only woman I had ever loved, the rare and radiant Gwendolina Belvidere, had refused me. She had not exactly spurned me—I was too good-looking to spurn—but she had declined the offer of my hand. She had told me, with tears in her blue eyes, that I was too poor, and that I had no expectations; that when she married she did not wish to be worried about her milliner's bills, or her tradesmen's books, and so, much as she esteemed my moral character, she should continue to look out for a husband with a good rent-roll.

It was candid of the girl; Gwendolina always was candid, but it dashed my hopes of happiness to the ground. I asked her if there was no hope; she answered 'None!' and so we parted—she to return to the giddy haunts of fashion, I to hire a lonely

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and cheap cottage on the confines of Epping Forest, and to dwell there a broken-hearted recluse. From the hour that I knew Gwendolina could never be mine I became an altered man. I dreaded to meet my fellow-creatures. I lived alone in my isolated cottage, the world forgetting, by the world forgot.

TABLEAU I.

ALL day long I had had a dull foreboding of some impending evil. Alone in the cottage, in the quiet country lane where I dwelt, far from the roar and riot of the mighty city, I had passed the evening wrapped in an old military cloak, which I wore summer and winter, and a deep reverie which never left me.

I had been thinking of the past.

The past! Oh, the ghosts that rose from the great churchyard of my long ago! Ghosts young and old, ghosts of men and ghosts of women; and high over them all towered the ghost I dreaded more than all—the ghost of myself.

The clock struck twelve. With a mighty effort I rose from my chair, and, waving back, with an imperious gesture, the spectres of the past, I went to the larder, brought out the bread and cheese and

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a dish of spring onions, and sat down to my solitary meal.

At that moment my attention was arrested by the sound of a footstep on the gravel path. It was the footstep of a man.

I rose, opened the door, and holding the candle high above me, to shield it from the wind, I exclaimed, '*Qui va là?*'

It was an old watchword of mine, familiar on my lips in happier days amid Crimean snows, and the rocky passes of far-off Afghanistan. The words came back that night like the long-forgotten echo of a childish dream. I knew not why I said them. The past had haunted me. I was living, speaking in the past.

'*Qui va là?*'

Again I challenged the footstep, and waited for the footstep to reply.

At that moment a heavy gust of wind swept up the valley, and ere I could save it, the light I held above me was extinguished.

'*Qui va là?*'

The storm, by this time, had gathered fury; there was a vivid flash of lightning, followed by a loud clap of thunder. In that sudden and natural illumination I could see the surrounding country distinctly. At my gate, drenched to the skin, was a horse.

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At my door, within arm's length of me, lay a policeman, with a sword by his side, and spurs on his boots.

He had not replied to my challenge. Why? Because he lay there at my feet, insensible, incapable of speech. He had swooned!

Gently I lifted him from the ground and carried him indoors. The lurid glare of the dying embers fell full upon his face and form.

I started in astonishment!

The man was the living image of myself. We could have passed for twin brothers. As I gazed at him with staring eyes for a moment, I fancied that I had suddenly risen from a dream, and was looking at myself in a glass. But I hadn't a helmet on, and a uniform and a sword. It was no hallucination. I pinched the buttons on his uniform; they were real.

Presently the man opened his eyes and gazed wildly around; then he opened his lips and groaned. I loosened his collar and removed his helmet. Instantly I discovered the clue to the mystery.

He had fallen from his horse in a sudden attack of vertigo, and had injured his head. He had crawled to my cottage for assistance. I felt his pulse and looked at his tongue, and I knew at once

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that he was about to be delirious. There were all the symptoms of brain fever.

My bedroom was next to the sitting-room; with little difficulty I carried him thither, undressed him carefully, and put him in my bed. Rest and quiet were all that he needed to assist his recovery.

While I was musing as to my future conduct in the matter I heard a neigh. It was the horse. At the same instant my eyes fell upon the helmet and uniform.

A sudden idea seized upon me.

I glanced at the sleeping form in my bed. It was I.

Instantly I slipped off my own clothes and placed them in the chair by the bed. Then I put on the uniform and helmet. Again I looked in the glass. I was he! We were both each other. No one could tell us apart.

It was a chance. Should I take it? Yes! I wanted to begin the world anew. I wanted to cease to be myself and be some one else. In ceasing to be myself, I should lose the sorrows that were mine. Yes, I would be some one else. I put on the helmet; I buckled on the sword; I put a jug of barley-water and a purse of gold by the bedside of the delirious man, and then I went down the garden-path and leaped upon the horse.

The change was complete.

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The delirious man in my bed was the Hon. Tom Montressor, and I was No. 307 of the Z Reserve, a mounted patrol! I had resolved.

I dug my spurs into my horse, and galloped forward into the night. I had commenced a new life!

TABLEAU II.

It was a bright, fresh morning. Of course, every new morning must be a fresh one, but this was fresher than usual. All night I had ridden hard along the country lanes, my sword clanking by my side. The exercise did me good, but by eight a.m. I was tired and wanted my breakfast.

I wondered what on earth I should do. Of course, a mounted patrol *must* go home in the morning, if he had been on duty all night. His horse would want to be fed and put in the stable. But where was the stable?

Suddenly the idea occurred to me that the horse would know, so I let the reins lie upon his neck and said 'Clk.' The sagacious animal instantly turned round and trotted off at a brisk pace.

In half an hour we arrived at our quarters. There could be no mistake about it, for the animal went straight into the stables with me on his back.

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An inspector was in the yard.

He came across to me, and exclaimed:

'Now, Jarvis, what does this mean? You're three hours late. What have you to report?'

My name was Jarvis. I had learnt that much, at any rate.

I invented an excuse at once, for I was determined to keep up the character, if I could. I said that I had been chasing a man who I believed had committed a burglary, but that he had escaped into the forest, and I had been riding about looking for him. I knew I had a right to be on the forest beat, because the real patrol had fallen outside my cottage, and he must have been there on duty.

I saw to my horse, and then went into the station. I wanted to find out where I lived.

'Hullo, Jarvis!' said a constable in the station. 'You're late. Going home now?'

'Yes,' I said; 'I'm tired; I shall turn in now.'

'All right, old chap. I'm going past your place; we'll go together.'

I was delighted. I should know where I lived now. We went out together; my companion lit a pipe; I felt in Jarvis's pockets and found there was a pipe and some tobacco there, so I smoked too.

Presently we came to a pretty little cottage, and my companion said, 'Good-morning, old chap.'

I felt that I was at home, and turned in at the gate.

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He came back.

'Oh, by-the-bye, old fellow, my missus says that she will come to your wedding. She's been thinking it over, and she's going to let bygones be bygones.'

I was taken aback for a moment, but I recovered myself directly, and grasped his hand.

'Thank you, old fellow,' I stammered; 'it's very good of her to say so.'

Then I went up the gravel path and pushed the cottage door open.

Everybody took me for Jarvis, and I was engaged to be married. I wondered what my sweetheart was like. I wasn't left long in doubt. As I opened the cottage door, a dark, rustic beauty ran to meet me.

'Oh, Jack, dear Jack!' she exclaimed, 'father and I were getting so fidgety about you; we thought something had happened to you. Come along; your breakfast's been waiting this hour for you.'

I took in the situation at a glance. I lodged with father, and this was the daughter, and she and I were going to be married.

When?

I should have to find that out, for it was rather important.

I didn't mind being Jack Jarvis, but I had qualms of conscience about marrying his sweetheart.

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TABLEAU III.

I MUST continue my narrative by relating events which only came to my knowledge at a later period. About the same time that I entered the cottage of the Littlethorpes (that was the name of father and daughter), and found myself an affianced husband, Lady Gwendolina Belvidere drove up in a carriage and pair to the lonely cottage on the confines of Epping Forest.

She knocked at the door, but there was no reply, so she lifted the latch and walked in. The parlour was empty, but from the adjoining room there came, ever and anon, the sound of groans.

'Good gracious me!' exclaimed Lady Gwendolina, 'I am sure some one is ill.'

Cautiously she entered the room, and gave a wild cry.

The Hon. Tom Montressor lay in bed, and he was delirious. To summon the village doctor was the work of a few moments. The village doctor looked at the patient, then turned to Gwendolina.

'My dear young lady,' he said, 'this is a serious case—injury to the head—brain fever. It will be weeks before he recovers his reason.'

'Oh, Tom, my poor Tom!' groaned Lady Gwendolina; 'this is indeed sad!'

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'Your brother?' asked the village doctor.

'No—not my brother,' stammered Gwendolina. 'I—I—came to see him—to bring him good news. He is the Hon. Tom Montressor.'

'What!' cried the doctor, 'the Hon. Tom Montressor who is advertised for in this morning's *Daily Telegraph?*'

'The same,' replied Gwendolina. 'You know, of course, that he is a duke now?'

'Yes, yes,' said the village doctor; 'and how strangely it has come about. I read of the accident in last night's *Echo*. There were thirteen people between this poor fellow and the dukedom; they all went out together in a yacht, which capsized. No one escaped, and the penniless distant relative is now a duke, with estates in nine counties, and an income of £1,000 a day. He must have every attention.'

'He shall,' replied Gwendolina; 'you and I, doctor, will nurse him back to life.'

And they did.

In six weeks the delirious man returned to his senses. He found Gwendolina in a chair by his side, and didn't know her. He declared he was a mounted patrol, and that he wanted to go home and marry Polly.

The village doctor assured him it was an hallucination—that it was the result of the injury to his

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head, and he must get rid of it—the hallucination the doctor meant—not his head. Then Gwendolina told him she was his own dear Gwendolina still, and that she had come to marry him, in spite of all.

Then they told him he was a duke, and had millions.

The convalescent looked at Gwendolina, and thought of the millions, and his scruples vanished. It was not for him to persist in his hallucination. He accepted the dukedom and Gwendolina's hand.

And when he was well enough, a carriage and pair fetched him and drove him off to one of his ducal palaces; and his approaching marriage with Lady Gwendolina Belvidere was duly announced in the *Morning Post*.

TABLEAU IV.

I WAS madly in love with Polly; I could not disguise it from myself. I liked being a mounted patrol. The man I had put into my bed had not come to claim his uniform or his sweetheart. I presumed he liked the life in the lonely cottage too well to return to duty.

I had taken his place. I was happy. I con-

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quered my last scruples, and for the sake of Polly I determined to remain Jack Jarvis and wed her. At first our sweethearting was a little awkward; she reminded me of so many things I couldn't remember, and once or twice I nearly put my foot in it. But I was very careful, and the course of our true love ran smoothly towards the wedding-day. I liked my duties; the horse exercise had quite cured my dyspepsia. I had forgotten Gwendolina, and I loved Polly. Her fresh and charming simplicity delighted me. I felt that we should be very happy. Better far to be a mounted patrol with thirty shillings a week and a bonny little wife, than a recluse with only the memory of a disappointment. The wedding-day arrived. I discovered that Polly had quarrelled with the constable's wife, and that was what she meant by bygones. She came to the wedding; so did all my fellow-constables who were not on duty; so did the inspector. It was quite a popular wedding, for Polly was beloved by everyone.

The old father was very jolly, but a little energetic. He was a market-gardener, and had market rather than garden ways. But he was good-hearted, and I forgave his lack of culture. We all went to church together, and then I got over a little difficulty. I explained that though I had been known all my life as Jack Jarvis, my real name

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was Thomas Montressor, and in that name I was married. The inspector pulled his moustache, and said something about assumed names being against the regulations; but I had been a good officer, and he would not report the circumstance to head-quarters. I thanked him cordially, and the bride gave him the first kiss.

As we came out of church the crowd hurrahed, and the village children flung flowers in our path.

All was joy!

Suddenly a middle-aged woman dashed through the crowd and hit me violently on the head with her umbrella.

'Oh, you wretch! oh, you monster!' she exclaimed.

Polly rushed between us.

'Spare him!' she cried; 'he is my husband!'

'Oh, you minx!' shrieked the woman; 'your husband, indeed—he's mine!'

'It is a lie!' I shouted indignantly, vainly trying to knock my battered hat into shape again.

'It is no lie,' said a detective from Scotland Yard; 'I have here the certificate of your former marriage. John Jarvis, I arrest you on a charge of bigamy.'

Polly fell into my arms. Dismay fell upon my comrades. Again the middle-aged woman fell upon me—with her umbrella.

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Then I was seized and dragged away, and at the hour when the bridal feast should haye been spread, I lay in a prison cell awaiting my trial for feloniously marrying Polly Littlethorpe while the middle-aged virago was alive—very much alive.

TABLEAU V.

I WAS taken before the nearest police magistrate and charged. The inspector identified me as John Jarvis—he swore that he had known me as John Jarvis ever since I joined the force two years ago. He told the story of the marriage register being signed Thomas Montressor, and this settled my guilt as a bigamist in the eyes of everyone. It was evident to them that I had feared to sign my right name, lest the previous marriage of John Jarvis should be discovered. The middle-aged virago swore to me—and at me—and it was with the greatest difficulty she was prevented doing still further damage to my personal appearance with her umbrella. She produced her marriage lines—she produced an old lady who had assisted at the former marriage. No living soul in court had a doubt of my guilt.

Except Polly!

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Polly, my darling little Polly!—my rustic, beautiful bride!—Polly God bless her! though she was led half fainting into the witness-box, declared that she believed I was innocent.

'That isn't a question for you to decide, my dear,' said the magistrate. 'What we want to hear from you is this: Is this person the man who married you yesterday?'

I believe Polly wanted to say 'No.' Some wild idea flashed across her brain, for a moment, of saving me by telling a story. But she glanced round the court, and saw all the wedding company there, ready to contradict her if she did, and so she sobbed out 'Yes.'

The evidence was clear. The magistrate asked me if I had anything to say. I could only repeat that it was a mistake. I dared not say that I had changed clothes with the real John Jarvis, who was my living image, because I wished to spare Polly's feelings. I didn't know how she would take it, and I was by no means sure that personating another man and marrying his young woman was not as grave an offence as bigamy. So I stammered out something, and was committed for trial, and the magistrate said he would take bail. But everybody was now dead against me for my heartless treatment of Polly, and nobody offered. Polly asked her father; but her father said 'No,' and

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added that I was safer in custody, for if I were out on bail he might break the peace himself, and get locked up in my place for assaulting me.

So I was led away a captive, to spend my honeymoon in prison; and Polly kissed her hand to me, and the middle-aged virago shook her umbrella at me, and then went straight for Polly, but was restrained by the old lady who had witnessed my former marriage.

And so I passed out of sight; no longer a mounted patrol, no longer a happy bridegroom, but a wretched prisoner awaiting my trial for bigamy. As I lay in my cell I thought a good deal; I wondered what the real John Jarvis was doing, and how I should ever be able to prove my own identity again.

TABLEAU VI.

THOMAS MONTRESSOR, Duke of FitzThomas, sat alone in one of the gorgeous apartments of his town residence. He had accepted the extraordinary freak of fortune which had changed him from a mounted patrol to a millionnaire duke without a murmur. At first he had hesitated, and had been inclined to demand explanations; but when he reviewed the situation, he felt that it would be foolish to quarrel

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with Providence. At last, when he found himself universally accepted as Tom Montressor and a duke —when he found the Lady Gwendolina looked upon him as her former lover—when he found himself received in the House of Lords, and allowed to take the oath of allegiance and to vote, he made up his mind that everybody must be right, and that the remembrance he had of once being a mounted patrol, and engaged to marry a girl named Polly, was due to the brain fever from which he opened his eyes one morning to find himself suffering in a lonely cottage on the confines of Epping Forest.

He had been a duke for some weeks, and he was getting used to it. One thing disturbed him slightly. On the morning that he sat alone in his gorgeous apartment he was reading the *Times*. He had nearly finished his favourite portion, the police news, when he came upon the trial of one John Jarvis, for bigamy, and it seemed to him remarkably strange that he clearly remembered marrying the middle-aged virago who gave evidence.

'Dear me!' he said to himself; 'so far as I can remember, I distinctly believed that woman to be dead, before I proposed to Polly. I wonder whether this John Jarvis remembers that fact.'

He read on.

'The prisoner urged that at the time he married the second wife he believed his first to be dead.'

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'Ahem!' said the Duke. 'I suppose he thought that was the best defence to make, and made it.' (The Duke was perfectly correct in his surmise.) 'Let's see what the poor beggar got!'

He read on.

'The Judge, in consideration of the prisoner's good conduct, the high character given him by his superiors, and the plausibility of his defence, said that justice would be met by a sentence of six weeks' imprisonment, and as the prisoner had already been that time in custody he would be immediately discharged.'

'Quite right!' exclaimed the Duke; 'but I pity him if he has to go back to that virago. It is singular how vividly I remember that woman in some part of my career anterior to that attack of brain fever.'

The Duke sat on absorbed in meditation until he was aroused from his reverie by the entrance of his private secretary, who announced the Prime Minister, the Marquis of S——.

'Well, FitzThomas, dear boy!' exclaimed the Premier, as he waltzed into the room in his usual excited manner; 'I hope you're coming down to the House to-night.'

'Well, my dear S——,' replied the Duke, 'I don't want to if I can help it. You see to-morrow is my wedding-day, and I want to get to bed early

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and have my beauty sleep. What time do you think the division will be?'

'Well, I'm afraid it will be late. Our fellows are so frightfully prosy when they do get on their legs, and half the peers are determined to speak on the question.'

'Then I shan't come!'

'But, my dear Fitz, you must. The fate of the Government is at stake. The division will be close; a vote will turn the scale.'

'My dear fellow, I shall yawn at the altar-rails to-morrow. We're going to be married before twelve.'

'Why not in the afternoon?'

'Oh, Gwen won't have it. It's a romantic idea of hers to be married in the ordinary way without a special license.'

'Better to yawn on your marriage morning than to let those wretched Whigs dish us,' urged the Premier. 'Come, if you turn up and stay for the division, I'll speak the word and you shall have the vacant Garter.'

Now the Garter was the one thing the new Duke coveted.

'Say yes, Tom,' urged the Marquis, grasping the Duke's hand.

The Duke hesitated no longer.

'You may rely upon me, Bob,' he murmured,

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and the Prime Minister waltzed out of the room delighted.

* * * * * *

It was six in the morning when the Duke of FitzThomas quitted the House of Lords. The Government had won by one vote. The Duke had saved his party. The Prime Minister came to him in the smoking-room when it was over, and wept in his arms. Then the Duke went out into the early morning, and walked home across the Park.

His wedding-day had dawned.

'Poor Gwen,' he said to himself, as he pulled out a short black clay pipe and filled it; 'I hope I shall make her happy. She is a good girl, and seems to have loved me very much during the period which, owing to that attack of brain fever, is a perfect blank to me, or rather which is filled with reminiscences of a lowlier kind, and during which I must have fancied myself a mounted patrol. But of course I never could have been a mounted patrol. I was Tom Montressor, a penniless gentleman of good family.'

Then the Duke glanced at the dirty clay pipe he was smoking.

'Dear me,' he mused, 'I wonder when I acquired this strange taste for a short clay. If I *had* been a mounted patrol in my former existence, I could understand it. But, pshaw! I never was.'

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It was past six in the morning when the duke let himself in with a gold latchkey set with diamonds, and retired to rest, in order to prepare himself for the fatigues of his wedding-day.

TABLEAU VII.

No sooner had the sentence of the judge been pronounced than I was led downstairs by the government warder and informed that I could leave the court as soon as I liked.

'Can I go out a back way?' I asked.

I had my reasons for wishing to leave by a back way. I had caught sight, in court, of the lady who said she was my first wife, and she had a new umbrella with her, and *two* female friends.

My request was complied with, and presently I found myself emerging by a little door into a side street.

There I found Polly waiting for me. Her sweet face was very pale, her beautiful eyes were suffused with tears, but when she saw me she dropped her veil, and said in a sweet, low voice, trembling with emotion:

'John, I forgive you. Henceforward we can be nothing to each other, but I hope you will be happy.'

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Then she broke down and sobbed as though her heart would break.

I was no longer master of myself. I clasped her in my arms and pressed her passionately to my breast.

'Polly, my darling,' I cried, 'you are my own true little wife. There is a hideous mistake which I cannot explain, but I am going to London to consult a solicitor. Trust me, darling, and wait and hope. When I come back again it will be to claim you as my lawful wife, before all the world.'

I didn't pause to think how all the world would be accommodated in the little country town to witness the spectacle, but I said what I meant.

'John,' she replied, looking up into my face with a depth of unutterable faith and love in her violet eyes, 'John, I believe you. I will wait and hope.'

She returned my kisses, gave me a little rose to put in my buttonhole, and so we parted. I shunned observation, went to the railway station, and took the first train to London, or rather the first train took me.

I arrived too late to consult a solicitor that day, so I went to an hotel, dined, and spent the evening in the smoking-room, arranging my plans. I felt that I must at once get upon the track of the man

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whose clothes and horse I had borrowed that fatal night in the cottage on the confines of Epping Forest.

Of course I didn't borrow the horse *in* the cottage, but outside. That, however, is a detail.

The next morning I rose early and made my way to the office of my family solicitor.

I sent up my name; the Hon. Tom Montressor, and the head of the firm came down in a hurry and stared at me in blank amazement.

'Good gracious!' he exclaimed, 'this is very extraordinary. What the dickins, your grace, are you doing here, and in these clothes? It's time you were at the church.'

'You make a mistake, sir,' I replied; 'I am no duke, I am Tom Montressor.'

'Ah, I see, an impostor, but a very extraordinary likeness. Go away, directly, sir, or I will give you into custody.'

'But, sir——'

'Don't detain me, you wicked man,' cried my solicitor, 'I am due at St. George's, Hanover Square, in ten minutes. The Duke of FitzThomas, my client, is married to-day.'

'Duke! What is the old man getting married again?'

'The old man? No, sir. The old man is dead, and the thirteen people who stood between Tom

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Montressor and the title all perished at sea in a yacht.'

'Then, Tom Montressor is the Duke of Fitz-Thomas?' I shrieked.

'Yes, sir; and you prove yourself an impostor. If you were Tom Montressor, you would know you were a duke.'

With these words he pushed me so violently out of the office that I fell down the stairs.

I had no time to return to the charge. I was determined to go to St. George's at once, and face the real impostor. I was a duke. I had been a duke all the time I was being tried for bigamy, as a mounted patrol. I quite understood now why Mr. John Jarvis had accepted the situation, and made no inquiries for his stolen uniform and horse.

But on whom was John Jarvis bestowing my name and rank?

I must find out at once.

I hailed a hansom, and drove at once to St. George's.

The street was crowded with the chariots of the aristocracy. Red carpet covered the church steps. There was a tremendous crowd outside. The bridal procession had just passed in.

I rushed in after it.

There, at the altar, amid a crowd of notabilities

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stood John Jarvis, the mounted patrol, and the Lady Gwendolina Belvidere!

The man's likeness to myself was extraordinary. It struck me more than ever, as I gazed at him in his ducal robes. I thought, for a moment, I was seeing myself in a looking-glass, only I had on a light suit and Polly's rose (a little faded) in my button-hole.

Two bishops, two vicars, one incumbent, and a curate, all relatives of myself and Lady Gwendolina, were officiating. The senior bishop was just commencing the service.

I felt that further delay would be dangerous.

I rushed forward and exclaimed:

'Stop!'

Every eye turned in my direction. There was a chorused cry of 'Good gracious!' And the family solicitor exclaimed, 'Why, it's that confounded impostor again!'

'I am no impostor!' I cried. 'Look at me, you people; look at me, Gwendolina. I am the Hon. Tom Montressor, now Duke of FitzThomas.'

'Most extraordinary!' said the bystanders; 'why, they are exactly alike!'

I pushed my way through the trembling bridesmaids, and I took the false duke by the collar.

Lady Gwendolina fainted.

'Excuse me, cousin,' I said to the senior bishop;

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'but the matter is urgent. This rascal has assumed my name and title.'

'It is false!' cried the sham duke, forgetting ordinary prudence in his wild rage and disappointment. 'It is you who took mine; you stole my uniform and my horse.'

'You hear?' I cried triumphantly, tearing the ducal robes from the impostor, 'he confesses it. This man is no duke, he is Jack Jarvis, a mounted patrol.'

Lady Gwendolina was carried into the vestry in a dead swoon.

'Stay,' said the bishop, my cousin, 'this is a most extraordinary and, I may say, a most unusual occurrence. The real Tom Montressor has a currant and raspberry mark on the left arm. Roll up your sleeves, both of you.' I rolled up mine. There, patent to the eyes of the astonished congregation, was the currant and raspberry mark.

'You are undoubtedly the duke,' said the bishop, 'do you wish to take this person's place? If so, I will send for Lady Gwendolina, and continue the ceremony so strangely, I may say, so unusually interrupted.'

At that moment there was a disturbance on the fringe of the gaping crowd. In another moment a middle-aged virago, with an umbrella, and *three* female friends had approached the marriage party.

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Seeing the sham duke the virago exclaimed, 'What! you villain; only just out of prison, and going to marry *another gal*.'

The false duke, who had remained calm until now, sank upon his knees in an attitude of terror!

'Save me from that woman,' he shrieked, 'and I will give up everything.'

At this moment the Marquis of S——, the Prime Minister, stepped forward and turned to the reporters in church, who were making copious notes. 'Gentlemen of the press,' he exclaimed, 'I shall be infinitely obliged if you will keep all mention of this painful affair out of the papers for reasons of State.' The reporters bowed and closed their note-books.

'Now, gentlemen,' continued the Marquis, turning to us, 'I shall be obliged if you will both accompany me to the vestry, and madam (addressing the middle-aged virago), if you will wait in my family pew for a few minutes with your friends, I shall take it as a personal favour.'

'Which, all four of us being true Conservatives,' said the lady, 'we shall be happy to oblige.'

They seated themselves, and Jarvis and I went into the vestry with the Prime Minister and the bishops and the principal guests.

There the explanation was short. I confessed the robbery, and the assumption of Jarvis's name

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and occupation, and related my conviction for bigamy.

The Marquis then explained that Jarvis having voted as a peer in the late division when he was not one, the fact of this business becoming public would be to involve the government in a serious dilemma. Could we not come to a mutual understanding and settle the matter privately?

'Certainly,' said Jarvis; 'give me two thousand pounds to take me to a far-off land, where that virago cannot follow me, let me out at a side door, and you shall never hear of me again.'

I consented; the Marquis, who had just the amount about him, kindly lent it to me, and the false duke vanished, to be seen no more.

Then I put on the ducal robes, and inviting all the company to follow me, drove off in the ducal carriage to my town residence. There it was agreed to accept me as the duke, and to let me take my place in the House of Lords, and we further agreed that as the likeness of Jarvis to myself was so extraordinary, nobody need be informed of the change.

The servants, as it was, all believed that I was the same duke who went out in the morning to be married.

While we were discussing matters, the bishop, my cousin, who had stayed behind at the church,

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came to inform us that the elderly virago was still there, waiting patiently, but that Lady Gwendolina had returned to her home, a disappointed and humiliated woman. Serve her right! She should not have refused me in the days of my poverty.

An announcement appeared in the next day's *Morning Post*, to the effect that on account of family matters the marriage of the Duke of FitzThomas and the Lady Gwendolina Belvidere had been broken off. I was master of the situation.

* * * * * *

The next day I returned to Polly. I found her at her father's cottage. I told her all. She flung her arms about my neck and whispered, 'Oh, Tom, I am glad I am a duchess, but I can't love you any better than I did when you were only a mounted patrol, because I loved you all I could then.'

We are very happy. Polly makes a splendid duchess, and her old father has gone to Australia, and I allow him a thousand a year to stop there. He writes us now and then: his last letter told us how John Jarvis had taken a public house, and is doing well in Melbourne. There is a middle-aged woman who passes her life between St. George's, Hanover Square, and the residence of the Marquis of S——. She is trying to find out what on earth has become of Mr. John Jarvis. She believes he is somewhere or other getting married.

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Last night I made a great speech in the House of Lords; Polly was in the Peeresses' Gallery, and Lady Gwendolina sat next her. Polly says Lady G. never took her eyes off her diamonds, and she was crying with envy every time they sparkled. Polly married me when I was poor; Gwendolina wanted to wait till I was rich.

Polly has the diamonds.

And I have the Garter. The Marquis of S—— was very grateful to me for holding my tongue, and gave me the Garter he had promised to the impostor, John Jarvis. I am to have a seat in the Cabinet directly there is a vacancy. I am glad I am a Conservative. Conservatives are so grateful to their friends, and always remember a service done.

Sometimes at race meetings I see my old inspector. He always comes and has a chat, and shakes hands with Polly, and he never forgets to say, 'Most extraordinary, your grace, most extraordinary thing I ever saw in my life. I was deceived myself, you know, and so were all the men; and, egad, I never look at you now but I see Jack Jarvis, the Mounted Patrol!'

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AN ORDER FOR THE PLAY.

BARON BLITZENHEIM sat toying with his teacup one morning at breakfast in his magnificent mansion at Kensington. The Baron's jewelled fingers trembled nervously, and as they trembled the fire flashed forth from the priceless gems with such brilliancy as almost to blind the young man who sat in a respectful attitude on the extreme edge of a magnificently upholstered armchair, awaiting the Baron's orders.

The young man was the Baron's private secretary —a worthy young fellow named Westmacott, who, having received a liberal education and taken a degree, found that liberal educations and degrees were drugs in the market, and that there was nothing open to a man of his attainments but an under-mastership at a suburban school, 'forty pound a year and live out of the house,' or a private secretaryship to some gentleman who had wealth and position, and wanted his letters written for him.

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It was just when his boots were worn out with walking from one scholastic agency to another, and he was thinking of turning his knowledge of drawing to account by opening an art exhibition of mackerel on the pavement, that he read the Baron's advertisement for a private secretary in the *Daily Telegraph*, applied for the position, handed in his testimonials, and was accepted.

As he sat on the extreme edge of the gorgeously upholstered chair, regarding the princely surroundings of the Baron with blinking and astonished eyes, and wishing he had a piece of smoked glass in his pocket, he was waiting for his first orders, It was the commencement of his tenure of the important office to which he had been appointed.

He knew that the Baron was a wealthy financier. a gentleman of German extraction, who had made millions on the Stock Exchange, who habitually used five-pound notes for cigar-lights, and had sovereigns brought up from his cellars in coal-scuttles when he wished to avoid the trouble of writing cheques for small amounts, such as five or ten thousand pounds.

The young man sat and watched the Baron with mingled feelings of awe and curiosity. There was a human being who had only to wish and to have, who could wave the magic wand of gold over the bleak and barren desert of life, and lo! the loveliest

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flowers would spring up around him, and his pathway would be over crushed rose-leaves.

The Baron took no notice of the young man. He sat toying with the teacup and reading a criticism in the *Daily Telegraph* on a new play which had been produced on the previous evening. It was evidently an exciting play, for the Baron murmured ever and anon, 'Good!' 'Capital!' 'By Jove, I must see that!' and presently he put the cup down on the saucer and exclaimed, 'I'll go to-night!'

He put the cup down with so much feeling that as it touched the saucer it shivered into a thousand —no, let us be truthful, into half a dozen—fragments, and the secretary, starting up, exclaimed mechanically:

'What a pity! such a beautiful cup too!'

The Baron looked up with a glance of cold astonishment in his eyes.

'Be good enough to ring the bell,' he said; and the secretary obeyed.

A footman entered the room.

'Tucker,' said the Baron, 'I've broken this cup from the Maccaroni Collection, which I purchased at Christie's last week for two thousand seven hundred pounds; see that the pieces are put in the dust-heap, lest they injure some one. I want another cup of tea; bring me Marie Antoinette's

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breakfast-cup, which Prince Semidoffer let me have as a favour for five thousand pounds when I was at Paris.'

'I beg your pardon, Baron,' said the footman calmly, and without the slightest tremor of voice or muscular contraction of feature; 'the Semidoffer cup was the one you threw at the bluebottle in the drawing-room last evening.'

'Oh, was it?' answered the Baron. 'I didn't notice what I took off the cabinet; the wretched thing annoyed me so with its buzzing. You can bring me Cleopatra's cup; the one set with diamonds and pearls. Make haste, for the cosy is off the pot, and the tea will be cold.'

As the servant left the room, the Baron glanced contemptuously at young Westmacott, as much as to say, 'The idea of your fancying the breakage of a two or three thousand guinea piece of china was anything to me!'

The new secretary was a man of the world. He saw the sort of person he had to deal with. He saw that everything around him was of the costliest description, and that money was no object. He determined to practise the wise precepts which a good mother had instilled into him when young, and suit his manner to his company; so later on, when the Baron picked up his paper and said, half-thinking, out loud, 'I should like to see this piece

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to-night, but I'm afraid there won't be a seat to spare,' the secretary rose and smiled, and remarked:

'Baron, if you will give me a handful of sovereigns, I have no doubt, even if all the boxes are gone, I can get some one to give up theirs at a premium.'

As he spoke, he noticed to his intense astonishment an extraordinary change come over the Baron. The modern Crœsus turned first white and then green, his hands trembled, the costly cup raised to his lips fell from his nervous fingers with a crash and Cleopatra's pearls and diamonds lay in a heap on the carpet. The Baron's head sank lower and lower on his breast, and presently with a heavy gasp he fell forward, apparently lifeless, on the floor.

The secretary, terror-stricken and horrified, felt sure that his new employer had been suddenly seized with an apoplectic stroke. He rushed to the bell and rang it violently till the stately footman entered, and between them they raised the prostrate Baron's senseless form and bore it to the sleeping-chamber.

The beauty of this apartment surpassed anything the secretary had ever seen in his life before. The bed was formerly the property of the famous Begum of Bokawallah, and, with the exception of

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one presented to the Queen by a well-known rajah of fabulous wealth, was the costliest couch in the civilized world. The surroundings were Oriental in their magnificence; the markets of the world had been ransacked by special agents with unlimited credit in order to bring together the gorgeous furniture and drapery of Baron Blitzenheim's bedchamber.

The young secretary was so astonished that his mouth would not shut, and he would have stood gaping in the middle of the room for a quarter of an hour, holding the senseless Baron's legs, had he not been recalled to himself by the voice of the footman, who said:

'Look here, guv'nor, the old buffer's jolly heavy. I can't stand here 'olding of him much longer.'

The young secretary, with many apologies for his temporary absence of mind, assisted the footman to lay their employer on the beautiful bed, and was about to leave the room and seek medical aid when a slight movement on the part of the Baron arrested him.

He approached the bed and bent his ear towards the lips of the senseless millionnaire, which were moving as though shaping a monosyllabic word.

There was a bluebottle in the room, probably the same which had annoyed the Baron on the previous day, and its buzzing prevented the secre-

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tary from catching the monosyllabic word which the Baron was evidently endeavouring to utter.

Calling the footman to his assistance, Westmacott commenced a vigorous pursuit of the objectionable insect. Armed with pocket-handkerchiefs, towels, hearth-brooms, and any weapon they could lay their hands upon, there commenced a desperate battle between the Baron's retainers and the irritating bluebottle, which strewed the place with costly wreckage. The Baron's lips still moved, and the bluebottle still buzzed.

The new secretary grew desperate. The words his employer was trying to speak might be words fraught with the direst import. He might be making his will—disposing of his fabulous wealth to a poor relative or a noble charity. The fate of generations yet unborn might be trembling upon the lips of the prostrate Crœsus, and the noise of a despicable, paltry bluebottle might be robbing intended heirs of millions. It was some name the secretary was sure that the Baron was trying to utter, but whether that of his solicitor, or his doctor, or his clergyman, or a near relative, until he and the footman could hear it distinctly, it was impossible to say.

Pausing in the confusion for a moment, and musing as scholars are wont to do, young Westmacott thought of all the little things which have

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influenced the fate of nations, the progress of mankind, and the condition of the entire created world. His fancy wandered away into the past, and he saw an ignorant scarecrow, a boy of some ten summers, shoot a stone from a catapult at hazard, and hit Mr. Shakespeare, who happened to be passing by, on the brow. Shakespeare at the time was just thinking of taking to play-writing.

'Ah,' thought the secretary, 'suppose that stone had killed Shakespeare, how many managers now bankrupt would be prosperous! how many now prosperous might be bankrupt! Had Wellington been choked with a marble as a child—with a common little eight-a-penny marble such as children will put in their mouths—would Waterloo have resulted differently? and had it done so, would the Crystal Palace——'

The young secretary was aroused from his meditation by the voice of the footman.

'There it is, sir; it's settled on the window. Now you've got it.'

Carried away by the excitement of the moment and the idea suggested by his recent train of thought, that on giving the bluebottle its *quietus* perhaps the future of Great Britain depended, the secretary seized the first thing he could lay his hand upon, and hurled it at the window-pane, where the cause of all the confusion had paused

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for a moment, perhaps to reflect upon the situation. The first thing he laid his hand upon happened to be a magnificent marble statuette, the work of a great Italian sculptor of the sixteenth century. Crash it went at the window. It hit the blue-bottle, it broke the pane, and went through into the street below, where it fell upon the head of a gentleman passing by, and, chipping a piece off his nose, disfigured him for life.

The gentleman, feeling himself damaged, put out his hand unthinkingly, and caught the statuette ere it had time to rebound from his person and touch the ground. He recognised the statuette at once, for he was himself a great collector.

'This comes from the mansion of the Baron Blitzenheim,' he said, turning cardinal with anger. 'He shall pay dearly for this assault.'

He was about to call a policeman and ring at the Baron's front door, when a sudden thought struck him (though it did not hurt so much as the statuette had done). He thought, 'If I go before a court of justice to get damages I shall have to prove that the statuette is the Baron's. I must give it up to him, and the amount I could recover for the damage to my real flesh and blood features is nothing to the value of these features carved in marble by the hand of a famous sculptor. I will pocket the insult.'

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Which he did, for he put the statuette in his pocket and took it home, where for many years it remained the gem of his collection, and was never claimed, the Baron having too many priceless *objets d'art* ever to miss one.

But it is not with the fate of this statuette, but rather with the Baron's we are concerned just now. The noise of the crashing glass having ceased, and the bluebottle being gone, the secretary could now hear distinctly the muttered words of his still unconscious master:

'Pay! Pay! Pay!'

'Dear me,' he said to the footman, 'he is asking for a Mr. Pay—do you know anyone of that name?'

The footman shook his head.

''Tain't his doctor, 'cos his name's Brown, and 'tain't his solicitor, 'cos his name's Jones; p'r'aps it's somebody as was dear to him in early life, and whose memory comes back now in his *delirium tremens*.'

The footman, who had really a sympathetic nature, shed a tear, the poetry of his own idea brought the apple up in the throat, and a convulsive sob escaped him. The secretary did not check him: there are not so many sympathetic natures in the world that we can afford to disdain one, even when it is discovered in the pampered menial of a wealthy German financier.

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The idea of Crœsus lying there with closed eyelids, surrounded by all this magnificence, and then murmuring a name dear to him in his perhaps poor and humble days, was one which a scholar could appreciate as well as a footman, and the secretary, too, felt affected by it. Why should he not share a footman's feelings, though he was a secretary? What is the difference between the two? Merely this: the footman gets a large salary and has his clothes found for him, the secretary gets a small salary and has to pay his own tailor's bills. *Telle est la vie.*

'Pay! Pay! Pay!'

The Baron began to turn uneasily from side to side, his eyes opened wildly, and closed again swiftly, as he ejaculated these words. There was a long pause between each word. He didn't say the three 'pays' as consideration for space have compelled me to write them. He repeated them in the tragic manner of the melodramatic actor, who has to come home to the humble attic which is always his till he comes into his estate, and finds his tame frog or his pet rat—his only friend—dead, and who says 'dead!' three times, and counts forty-five between each; only the Baron did not fold his arms—at present he was too weak to do that.

The secretary and the footman stood by the bedside and waited for further information.

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The secretary shook the Baron gently when the cheeks grew a little pinker and the lips less livid, and asked where Mr. Pay lived, and if he wished him sent for; but the Baron could not be made to understand. He was evidently recovering from the stroke, of whatever nature it had been, but his mind was wandering and could not be fixed.

'I think we'd better do something, sir,' said the footman. 'Put a key down his back, or give him a bit of hard cheese.'

'No, no,' muttered the secretary; 'better not try any remedies on our own responsibility. I will go for a doctor. I should have gone before, but the bluebottle put it quite out of my head. Watch your master till I return.'

The secretary hailed a cab—outside, of course, not in the Baron's bedroom, though there were many curiosities there, a cab was not one of them—and bade the man drive to the nearest doctor.

'All right, sir,' answered the man, with a wink; 'jump in.'

The secretary did not jump—he was not athletically inclined—he stepped in, and the cab rattled off.

After driving for about half an hour, he became anxious, and put his head out of the window.

'There must be a doctor nearer than this!' he exclaimed.

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'No, there ain't, sir. The doctor I'm taking you to is that near he sends pills home screwed up in a bit o' paper to save buying the boxes. Ha! ha!'

The secretary sprang out of the cab in a rage, and took the man's number.

'This is infamous!' he exclaimed, boiling over with rage. 'Here is the life of a millionnaire in peril, and you dare to play a practical joke on me!'

'I beg your pardon, sir,' said the man, looking quite astonished, 'but Theodore Hook——'

'Theodore Hook, sir! What the dickens has Theodore Hook to do with it?'

'Why, you see, sir, he was always playing practical jokes, and everybody always seems to have enjoyed 'em. I was reading his life in our shelter the other day, sir, and he was always up to larks like that, sir, and I thought as perhaps——'

The secretary was flabbergasted. He motioned the man to silence, and mused.

'This,' he thought, 'is the effect of education. Cabmen now beguile their leisure in the shelters with biography, travel, and romance. Here is a man who has taken Theodore Hook for his model, and cannot understand that it is only great men who may play practical jokes. Pray goodness the masses will not presently take the heroes of history

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for their models, or we shall have a four-wheel cabman, of the Socialists' Club and Union, walking into Westminster one evening, assaulting the Speaker, and clearing the House, in imitation of the late Oliver Cromwell.'

The secretary mused on until the cabman, recovering his spirits a little, ventured to remark, with a hesitating smile, 'It's sixpence a quarter of an hour, sir,' and thus recalled the young man to a sense of the situation.

'Look here, Theodore Hook,' he exclaimed, stepping into the cab again, 'be good enough to drive me to a doctor at once—not a doctor of divinity or laws, but a doctor of medicine; and if I have any more of your jokes I'll take you to see the Colonel.'

'Why, cert'nly.'

'No, not that colonel—Colonel Henderson. So don't let me catch you on that Hook again.'

The cabman touched his hat respectfully at these words, and drove at once to a fashionable doctor.

The doctor was engaged. There were thirty or forty people in the waiting-room, but the secretary managed to get near the keyhole of the consulting-room and whisper, 'Baron Blitzenheim wants you.'

The effect was magical.

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The doctor, who was just in the act of sounding a country curate's lungs, left the astonished priest in his shirt-sleeves, darted into the hall, trod on the toes of an old gentleman with the gout who had just arrived, making him use such language that the police came in and took his name and address, and, before the astonished secretary could find his hat among the heap on the table of the consulting-room, the doctor was in a cab and off to the Baron's address.

'Wealth,' mused the young man, 'the golden calf, commands the worship of all. The country curate, in his shirt-sleeves, cannot pipe the footsteps of science to dance when the money-bags jingle a merrier tune in the distance.'

He would have mused much more, had not the ladies and gentlemen in the consulting-room immediately called an indignation meeting, elected a chairman, and commenced a letter to the editor of the *Times*, and interrupted his musings by passing a vote by acclamation that the young man who had caused the doctor to take his employer out of his proper turn should be summarily expelled with as much violence as was necessary.

Under these circumstances he left off musing, and began to search for his hat in an agitated manner. He was saved further trouble by being thrust down the steps, and a hat was flung after him. It was

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not his own, it was two sizes too large; but he put it on, comforting himself with the idea that the great law of compensation could not be defied, and that if he had a hat that came over his eyes, some one else would have to wear one that would not go over his head.

When he arrived at home he went straight to the Baron's bedchamber. He entered without knocking, because had he knocked he did not imagine that even if the Baron had said, 'Come in,' he would have been in a physical condition to say it loud enough to be heard outside a door. To say 'Come in' through a door is a strain upon the lungs, and an exertion to which no thoughtful man would put an invalid.

The secretary entered noiselessly—so noiselessly that his presence was not at first observed. The Baron was evidently better, for he was sitting up in bed, supported by pillows, and the footman and the fashionable doctor were administering teaspoonfuls of brandy—two hundred years in bottle—from the cellar of Prince Esthermisty, every spoonful of which was worth its measure in molten gold.

Between the gulps the Baron and the doctor conversed.

'Tell me, my dear Baron,' said the latter, 'now that you feel stronger, what was the cause of this strange attack?'

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'It was my new secretary,' gasped the Baron. 'The fool—the knave—the scoundrel! I wanted to see the new piece produced last night at the Star Theatre, and he suggested that I should pay—Pay! Pay!! Pay!!!'

The Baron raised his voice at each succeeding 'pay;' the last was a hoarse shriek.

'Scandalous,' said the doctor, 'scandalous conduct on his part; but—ahem!—of course—that is—would you mind telling me how it gave your system such a tremendous shock? You see, paying to see a play is—ahem!—pardon me, as a professional man I must enter into the symptoms of your illness; not—ah—exactly the thing to knock a man of ordinary health into a—ha! ha!—you'll excuse the familiarity, Baron, a—ahem!—a cocked hat.'

The Baron regarded his professional attendant with a look of blank amazement.

'Pay to see a play? Pay for a seat at the theatre? I?' he exclaimed. 'Why I never did such a thing in my life. I always wait till I get an order. Why, bless me, doctor, stalls are ten shillings each! Why, I don't give that for my cigars! The idea of paying ten shillings to see a play, when there are always orders to be had! Besides, what's the good of being somebody, and a millionnaire, if you haven't the *entrée* of the theatres?'

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The secretary came from his concealment; he saw his guilt—he had never viewed the matter in that light before. He knelt by the bedside, kissed his employer's hand, and exclaimed, 'Baron, I had no idea you always went in with an order. Let me repair my fault by getting you one for this play.'

'Get me one,' said the Baron, 'and I will forgive you; but fail, and you will quit my service. Here is a blank cheque on my bankers for any expense you may be put to, but get me an order. But beware of trying to deceive me! Pay for the seat, and it will be my death! There will be an inquest, and the chances are, if the coroner is in a hurry for his dinner, he will direct the jury to bring in a verdict of wilful murder against you.'

'And,' said the doctor, eyeing the kneeling secretary severely, 'my evidence will certainly support such a decision. Thank you!' The latter words were addressed to the Baron, who pressed into the physician's hand a bundle of hundred-pound notes as his fee.

The secretary and the doctor went out at the front door together.

'How do you get an order?' asked the former.

'Oh,' said the doctor, 'I generally send in my card, or look out the author's address in the Directory and write to him; or get my washerwoman,

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who knows the stage carpenter, to ask him to ask the acting manager.'

'Don't you ever pay, then?'

'Not if I can help it,' said the doctor, pocketing the bundle of bank notes. 'I don't seem to enjoy a play if I have to pay for my seat.'

The secretary thanked him for his information, and they parted.

The secretary went straight to the theatre and asked to see the lessee. The lessee was making his will in his private room; he was also reading a new drama, and consulting his architect about alterations insisted on by the Board of Works, but he came down at once and saw the gentleman. Lessees always do.

'I beg your pardon for disturbing you, but could you give me an order for one to-night?'

'Ah,' said the lessee, with a sigh, 'I am very sorry, I have been compelled to refuse a duke, four earls, twenty Members of Parliament, and about three hundred of the general public. You see, I want a little money in the house to-night, as my butcher has sent his bill in and asked for payment. Unfortunately he does not give steaks and chops away.'

The Baron's secretary retired and looked out the author's address in a Directory. He took a cab to the house at once, and knocked at the door.

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'Master's having a warm bath,' said the servant.

'Oh, then, don't disturb him,' exclaimed the secretary; 'I'll go to him.'

And before the servant could stop him he was upstairs, and, finding the bath-room by instinct, popped in on the dramatic author just as he was up to his neck in steam.

'Pardon this interruption,' said the secretary, 'but can you oblige Baron Blitzenheim with an order for the play?'

The author was not a man of violent temper. He didn't mind applications for orders coming from people he had never seen at the rate of five hundred a week; but when the secretary of a millionnaire followed him to his bath for one, it was too much.

'Order!' he exclaimed; 'yes, I'll give you the order of the bath!'

He was a powerful man. With one hand he turned on the hot tap full, and with the other he plunged the secretary into the boiling liquid.

'Really,' said that gentleman, as he rose and wrung out the skirts of his coat and emptied his boots, 'there is more difficulty than I thought in getting an order.'

As he went musing along the street he met a policeman. In quite a fit of abstraction—just as any one would say, 'Can you tell me the way to

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Regent Street ?'—he said, 'Can you tell me the way to get an order for the play ?'

'Well,' said the policeman, 'I gets one now and then.'

'How ?'

'Why, my missus keeps a 'bacca shop, and we show the bills of the theatre. Then, for that, if there his a horder knocking about, we gets one, and, lor! ain't there a lot o' people on to us fur it ?'

'Why ?'

'Well, you see, there's hundreds o' well-to-do folks what never pays to go to a theatre. They all'ys says, "Oh, there's sure to be a bit o' paper about presently; we'll wait and go in for nothink." Goin' in for nothink, it's constitutional to the country, I think, sir. Good evening.'

'Strange!' mused the secretary. 'Why should people who can make money right and left suffer any indignity, put themselves under any obligation, to get an order for the play? And if everybody goes in with an order, or waits till paper is about, how does the manager pay his company? Bah! that's not my business—mine is to get an order for the Baron, and I will.'

He saw how to do it at once. The Baron had told him to spare no expense. The next morning he filled up his blank cheque and bought a shop

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ready stocked that had a bill of the new play outside. Then he wrote to the manager to say that, as he exhibited a bill, perhaps he would oblige him with an order.

A courteous letter came by return of post, and with it an order.

Hurrah!

The secretary threw his hat in the air, and gave the business and the rest of the blank cheque to a poor but deserving female who happened to be passing. Then he drove straight to the Baron's.

'I've got it!' he cried, 'I've got it!'

Then he put the envelope, with the order in it, on the mantelshelf, and fell on the Baron's neck and wept.

The Baron loaded him with presents; he gave him Catherine of Russia's snuff-box, Bonaparte's walking-stick, and Oliver Cromwell's boxing-gloves. Then they strolled out together, and dined at a French restaurant, twenty-five pounds a head, *vin non compris, mais pain à discrétion.*

The Baron was like a child. He was going to the play with an order!

After dinner, lighting a cigar with a blank cheque —fearful extravagance, but pardonable under the circumstances—the Baron returned home, put the envelope, with the order in it, in his pocket, and hastened towards the Strand.

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They had dined early, for the play commenced at half-past seven. It was five minutes to seven as the Baron left his house—ten minutes past when he reached the theatre and handed it in at the box-office.

'Here, this won't do!' said the official. 'This is a bill order for the pit—not admitted after seven.'

The Baron turned ghastly pale.

'Not admitted after seven?' he gasped. 'Can't I go in?'

'Not without you pay.'

The word was no sooner uttered than the Baron fell forward heavily on the checktaker, and was carried in an unconscious state to a chemist's shop.

He recovered, only to be hopelessly idiotic, and he is now in a lunatic asylum, where he passes his days in writing, 'Please pass one to pit.'

His immense wealth has passed to the Crown, and his private secretary is now an acting manager himself. He gives orders—oh, certainly he does. There isn't a day passes that he doesn't give orders—that if anybody wants to see him to ask for a free admission, be he peer or pauper, he is to be presented with a printed report of the Lunacy Commissioners on the shocking mental condition of Baron Blitzenheim, the millionnaire, who wouldn't pay to see a play.

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THE HANDSOME FISHERMAN.

ONE bright summer morning in the year 188— the sea was dashing furiously over the Grand Parade at Eastbourne. Whirling and swirling, seething and wreathing, the great waves rolled in one after the other, and broke in fury against the solid masonry, sending a great mountain of spray high in the air, and hurling a shower of pebbles far over into the roadway beyond.

It was a grand sight—a grand sight for the visitors staying at the Albion Hotel, who surveyed it safely from the windows of their sitting-rooms—a grand sight for the little boys and girls who played bopeep with the waves, scrambling back with many a ringing laugh as an extra big wave cried, 'I'll have you!' and pursued the little ones farther than any previous wave had dared to do. But it was not a grand sight for pretty Polly Misters, who was helping her husband, Handsome Joe, with his nets, and who, being a cockney lass,

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had a mortal terror of the sea, and hated her Joe to be on it except when it was as smooth as glass.

He idolized his little Polly, but he sometimes got very cross with her when she made a fuss about his going out with his mate, Will Mockett, in their fishing-boat.

'My lass,' he would say, 'you're a sailor's wife, and you ought to behave as such.'

'But the sea is so dreadfully rough, Joe,' Polly would urge with a pout. 'I'm sure it's not safe for you to go out in that wretched cockle-shell to-night.'

Now, the *Polly of Eastbourne*, the boat in which Joe had the largest share, was as taut a little craft as ever fisherman risked his life in for his daily bread, and when the lass that it was christened after called it 'a cockle-shell,' Joe would lose his temper and say that he was darned. Darned was not the fashionable word among the Eastbourne fishermen, but Joe used it in preference to the one affected by his comrades.

From this little introduction the intelligent reader will have gathered what was the nature of the conversation between Joe and his wife as they stood on the high beach beyond the parade getting the nets ready for the *Polly of Eastbourne* to put to sea with. While they are conversing—while Polly is arguing that it is a terrible sea, and Joe is

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protesting that he would not mind being on it in a tub with Polly's parasol for a sail—there is an opportunity, of which I eagerly avail myself, to tell the reader something of the past history of my hero and heroine.

Joe met Polly at the Fisheries Exhibition. She was one of those pretty girls in mob-caps who used to serve the company with coffee at the little marble tables while the band was playing. Joe was in charge of a sailing-boat exhibited by an Eastbourne builder. The café where Polly served was just opposite the place where Joe's boat stood. It was love at first sight. The pretty little waitress fell in love with the handsome fisher-lad, and when the exhibition closed they went to church, the parson blessed them, and Joe brought his little cockney wife down to the restless sea to share his fisherman's cottage and to be the joy of his future life.

They were happy enough till the weather grew stormy and the hard winter came, and Joe had to be out all night, and sometimes many nights, in pursuance of his perilous vocation.

Poor Polly had a London girl's horror of the sea, and she made up her mind that Joe would soon be drowned, and that she should be a widow. She tried to persuade him to sell his share in the *Polly* and come to London and earn a living on terra

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firma. She vowed that 'when Joe was away o' nights she couldn't sleep for the howling of the wind'; and at last Joe got to dread going out fishing himself because of the scenes which always preceded his departure.

There never had been such a scene as the one which occurred on the beach on the day this story opens. Polly had hysterics, Joe went a step or two beyond his customary 'darn,' and the other fishermen and their wives came up, and they all said Polly ought to be ashamed of herself. And the women were especially nasty in their remarks, for they were hard-faced, weather-beaten women, and despised Polly's London ways, and thought her a 'minx' and 'a stuck-up piece of goods,' and there was not one of them that could see where the prettiness was that the men raved about so much.

And the end of it was that Polly went off the beach sobbing and crying, and declaring she would go back to London to her friends, and she was sorry 'she'd ever lowered herself to marry a fisherman, who let a lot of old fishfags insult her'; and Joe went off to sea in his boat in a towering rage, and bit his old clay pipe so viciously that it broke off short and fell over the boat's side into the sea —and that upset him still more, for next to Polly and the boat he loved his old clay pipe.

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'One!' cried old Will Mockett, Joe's partner, as the pipe went overboard.

'What d'ye mean by "one"?' said Joe.

'I mean as that's the fust bit o' bad luck: we've lost one thing to-day — we're bound to lose three.'

'So long as the boat ain't one, I don't mind,' exclaimed Joe; and then, with a growl, he added, 'P'r'aps if me and the boat too was to go after the pipe, the wench 'ud be happier.'

'Git out!' said Will Mockett; 'why, she dotes on yer, mate.'

'No, she don't, Will; she did, but the life's too rough; and me bein' away so much, and her hatin' the sea, and one thing and the other, I begin to think as arter all I did the lass a bad turn when I took her away from them lights and corffee-cups and all the swell things as she'd been accustomed to. 'Twarn't likely she'd settle down into a rough, hard-workin' fisherman's wife. She might ha' done much better, bless her pooty face, and so might I.'

'So might you! What d'ye mean, mate?'

'I ain't never told the story to a single livin' soul afore, Will, but I want to talk about somethin' to relieve my mind now, so I'll tell you; but you must promise not to tell anybody else, for if ever it come to Polly's ears she'd be that jealous——'

'Why, whatever are ye a-drivin' at, Joe Misters?

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You don't mean to say as you was in love with somebody afore you married Polly!'

'No, mate; but somebody was in love with me. I had a offer o' marriage in the Fisheries.'

'A offer o' marriage, Joe?'

'Yes, and a tiptop offer, too. I'll tell you all about it. It was one evening in July, and I was a-standin' by the boat I was exhibiting, and explainin' all about it, when I noticed a very handsome, very dark young lady—in fact, a almost black young lady—a-standin' with a lot o' them chaps as wears turbans and long gowns like and slippers; and she was a-lookin' that hard at me as I felt myself blush to the roots of my beard——'

'You a-blushin' cos a gal looked at you, Joe. Ha, ha, ha!'

Will Mockett lay back in the boat, and roared till he was black in the face.

'You may laugh, Will,' continued Joe, gravely, 'but I did; and by-and-by, when the crowd was gone, I blushed again, for the young lady come back with a elderly black gent, dressed in European costoom, and pointed to me and said somethin' in a foreign lingo, as I didn't understand. The old gent looked 'ard at me, took down the number of my stand in a pocket-book, and then they passed on. But the young lady kept a-lookin' back that strange at me that I stuck there open-mouthed like a

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statute. All that night I wondered what it could mean; and when I told a chap as I knew about it, he said most likely they was Cannibals, and the gal wanted her father to buy me for her supper.'

'And was they Cannibals, Joe?'

'You wait a bit. The next day who should come up to me at the exhibition but the old black gent. "Young man," he said, "you come back my country with me—me king—very rich—my daughter love you—say no man never be husband but you—only daughter—very fond. Come back—marry daughter. Be king after me."'

'Lor, Joe,' exclaimed Will Mockett, 'whatever did you say?'

'Say, mate? Why, I said I was very much obliged for the offer, but I loved a young woman named Polly, and I couldn't give her up even to be king. I heard arterwards as the Princess went back broken-hearted, poor thing; and it do seem 'ard as Polly should be so tantrumyfied, seein' what I give up to marry her.'

After Joe had finished his story, he relapsed into a moody silence, from which his companion was unable to draw him. The wind was fair, the little boat made good headway, and they were soon far away from land. When night came on, a gale sprang up with the darkness, the bad weather grew

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worse, and Joe and his mate knew they were in for a rough time.

Joe was just thinking how Polly, her temper over, would be sitting by the cottage fire and listening to the wind, and thinking of him, when Will gave a loud cry of alarm. In an instant, before he could ask the cause, a great vessel came crashing into them; there was a wild whirl of water—Joe felt the great ocean close over him, and he knew no more.

* * * * * *

A year had gone by since the day that Polly and Joe parted with angry words upon the Eastbourne beach. Will Mockett, picked up by a fishing-boat, had returned to tell how a great vessel had cut their boat down, and how he had sunk and come up again, and shouted, but could not make the vessel hear; and how he had given himself up for dead, when a fishing-boat came along and saved him. They had cruised about a bit, but no trace of Joe was to be seen. Poor fellow! he was in Davy Jones's locker—never to come out of it till the Judgment Day.

They broke the news to Polly quietly. She wrung her hands and sobbed, and then, like a brave little woman, hid her grief, and, vowing to be true to her husband's memory, went up to London and got her old place again as a waitress at the Health Exhibition.

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Young fellows came about the charming little widow, and she could easily have married again, and married very well, had she chosen; but she turned a deaf ear to them all—her heart was buried in the sea.

One night towards the close of the Exhibition, a grand *fête* was held, to which the admission was ten shillings. There was quite a gathering of the aristocracy; many foreign notabilities were present, and at least half a dozen crowned heads.

Among the latter was a black old gentleman, who was pointed out to Polly by the head waiter as a very wealthy old monarch, the King of ——, an island off the West Coast of Africa.

The King was accompanied by his daughter, a fine, handsome girl, with a look of fixed melancholy. Polly was rather surprised when they came and sat down at her table, and the princess said, in excellent English, 'A cup of coffee, please.'

Polly served the coffee, and was about to curtsey and retire, when the King motioned her to stop.

'Be seated,' he said.

Polly blushed, and explained to the monarch that the manager would object to her sitting down with the company.

'We can have a private room, papa,' whispered the Princess.

'Certainly, my dear. Young lady, take us to a

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private room, and give the manager my compliments and ask him to excuse you for a few minutes.'

It all seemed like a dream, so rapidly did events follow each other, but in five minutes Polly found herself in a private room with the King of —— and the Princess, his daughter.

'Now, my dear,' said the King to his daughter, 'come to business, for this young lady has her duties to attend to.'

The Princess, so addressed, fixed her bright black eyes on Polly, and thus commenced:

'You are a widow?'

'Yes, your Royal Highness; my poor husband was drowned at sea.'

'It was not a happy match,' said the Princess. 'You disliked his profession. Afterwards you were sorry you married him.'

Polly opened her eyes to their full extent with astonishment.

'How can you know all this?' she exclaimed.

'It is very simple,' said the Princess. 'Your husband has told me so himself.'

'My—husband!' gasped Polly.

'Yes; he was not drowned—he managed to catch the chain of the ship that cut his boat down, and hang on to it until at last he made those on deck hear him. The ship brought him to our island, to

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which it was bound with cargo. To make my story short, I loved your husband before you married him. When Providence brought him to my feet, I offered him my hand. He refused on the plea that he was married, and that his wife would be expecting him home. In our country, the fact of his having one wife already would be no bar to his marrying again; but he declared that according to the law of his country it would be bigamy. Finding him obstinate, my papa had him put in irons and cast into a dungeon, where he will remain until he consents to be my husband.'

'Oh, horrible!' cried Polly. 'My poor Joe alive, and in a dungeon! Oh, Princess, have pity on him, and let him out!'

The Princess's eyes filled with tears.

'My poor girl,' she cried, 'I am very sorry for you, but I love Joe quite as much as you do. *I* should never quarrel with him or reproach him. Come, set him free, that he may marry me and be a king when my papa dies. Papa is very infirm, and cannot live long, and then my husband will ascend the throne.'

'That is quite right, my dear,' chimed in the King; 'and before I go hence I wish to see my only child married to the man of her choice. Come, madam, I beseech you not to spurn our prayer.'

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Great tears rolled down the black King's cheeks, and Polly was genuinely moved.

'What do you wish me to do?' she asked.

'To let us take back the news of your death to Joe,' answered the Princess, putting her arm round the little waitress's waist. 'With you out of the way, he will not hesitate a moment to purchase his freedom by accepting a queen and half a crown.'

'And if I refuse?'

'If you refuse,' said the Princess haughtily, 'Joe will end his days in a dungeon. Come, papa,' she exclaimed, turning to the monarch, 'pay for the coffee and the room, and let us go. We will call for the young woman's answer to-morrow.'

The old King flung a five-pound note on the table, telling Polly to keep the change, and before the poor girl could recover from her astonishment he and his daughter were at the model dairy having apricots and cream.

Polly never closed an eye that night. In her humble lodging at Camden Town she lay and tossed from side to side, and wondered what she should do.

Joe was in prison: on her depended his future—his very life. The next morning, Polly rose early, consulted the landlady, who was a shrewd woman of the world, and then had all her plans arranged by the time she reached the Healtheries.

The Princess came alone for her answer.

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Polly gave it to her at once. 'You can tell Joe,' she said, 'that I believed he was drowned; and so being lonely in the cottage by the sea, I married his mate, Will Mockett, who was saved; and we are very happy, and I hope Joe won't come back, it would be so very painful for all parties. He had better marry you, and let the past be forgotten. See, I have written it in a letter, which you can take to Joe—it will be more convincing.'

Polly handed the Princess the letter, and then the two women embraced each other with much emotion and parted for ever.

That very day the Princess and her father sailed for their kingdom, bearing the precious letter with them; and that very day Polly——but I must not anticipate events.

* * * * * *

It was a national holiday in the island of —— off the west coast of Africa. The entire island had gathered in the metropolis to see the wedding of the Princess and the handsome English sailor.

Punctually at eleven, Joe, clad in a gorgeous costume, arrived at the palace gates, and was received with open arms by the King.

Joe had fretted a good deal over Polly's letter, but as he could not go back to England without (as she put it) causing much pain to all parties, he determined to accept the Princess's hand and end

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his days on the island where his second marriage would be, of course, perfectly legal.

The Princess, beside herself with joy, looked supremely beautiful as she took Joe's hand and led him to the temple where the ceremony was to be performed according to the native rites.

Just as the Great Wise Man who officiated was about to commence the wedding ceremony, the British Consul hurriedly entered the building and placed a telegram in the bridegroom's hands.

Joe opened and read it:

'From Polly to Joe. My letter, a ruse to persuade you to come out of dungeon. Now you are free, the British Consul will protect you. Come home at once to your ever-faithful Polly.'

Joe flung his hat in the air as he finished the telegram, danced a wild hornpipe, to the astonishment of the Great Wise Man, and then, before the company had recovered from their surprise, ran out of the temple.

'Where are you going, Joe?' shrieked the Princess, rushing after him.

'Back to Polly!' yelled Joe.

The Princess turned white with rage, and the King ordered the troops to pursue Joe and bring him back. But the British Consul wrapped him in the British flag, and so they dared not fire; and,

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thus protected, Joe reached the shore, and was rowed out to a British man-of-war which was cruising in the offing, and which had that very day received sealed orders to sail for England.

* * * * * *

It was Christmas Day when Joe, having travelled all night from Plymouth, where the man-of-war cast anchor, reached Eastbourne. He found the cottage charmingly decorated, and Polly, with a sprig of mistletoe in her hair, waiting at the door to receive him.

And what a Christmas dinner it was! Will Mockett cried like a child; and after dinner the mayor and corporation came in a body and presented Joe with an address, and in the evening bonfires were ignited on Beachy Head, and special Christmas numbers of the Eastbourne *Courier* and the Eastbourne *Standard*, containing a portrait of Joe and Polly, were given away to everybody, and a subscription, headed by the Duke of Devonshire, was started, and so much money was raised that next year Polly and Joe will be able to have a restaurant at the Inventories all their own—that is to say, if the catering is flung open to competition.

The Princess of —— was very ill for a few weeks. After that, she listened to the good advice of the British Consul, who was a handsome young Englishman, and married him amid great rejoicings.

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This teaches us that husbands and wives should never part with angry words, and that a simple English girl is a match for all the foreign and colonial princesses that ever drew breath. It should also not be overlooked that the British flag in the hands of an energetic British Consul is a powerful ingredient in a spirited foreign policy, and long may it wave over the brave and the free people who alone understand Christmas and the literature appertaining thereto.

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CHRISTMAS DAY IN A COAL-CELLAR.

I WILL tell you the old gentleman's story in his own words.

* * * * * *

It was Christmas Eve—the last Christmas Eve that I should be a bachelor. On Boxing Day I was going to be married to the dearest, charmingest little creature in the world. We were going to be married on Boxing Day because there was a cheap trip to London that day, and Bella's aunt (my sweetheart's name was Bella), who was a millionnairess, and would leave Bella everything when she died, would only come to the wedding if it didn't cost her more than five shillings. The third-class fare from where she lived on ordinary days was 9s. 9½d.; but on Boxing Day the fare by the trip was only 4s. 9d. That just left the female Rothschild 3d. for her 'bus fare to the church. Of course, we would have paid Bella's aunt's fare, Pullman Drawing-Room all the way, and a special engine, to have her

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with us; but she wouldn't allow anyone to pay for her.

'If any one pays for me,' the estimable old lady used to say, 'it's sure to cost me double as much some other way.'

Under these circumstances she wouldn't hear of a special Pullman. So we agreed to sacrifice our genteel notions, Bella and I, and get married on Boxing Day and to have aunt at the ceremony. She would never have forgiven us if we had not arranged it so. There was a fellow named Jobson who was sweet on Bella; but I had cut him out, and I felt like a king going to be crowned.

It was Christmas Eve. I had parted from Bella, kissed her, wished her good-bye till we met at the altar, and, with my pockets and my black bag laden with presents, I was making my way to my married sister's, where I was going to spend Christmas Day. My sister was blessed with eight chubby little urchins and urchinesses who called me uncle, and so you may imagine my black bag contained a pretty varied assortment of Christmas offerings.

The afternoon had been misty; the night came on decidedly foggy. Slowly the houses grew more and more indistinct, and the front railings became dim suggestions rather than facts. I was groping my way along Westbourne Terrace, en route for my sister's, and I went wrong at a turning. I determined

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to ask my way, and peered through the fog to see if anyone was near me. In the distance I could hear two men conversing in a gruff voice, but I couldn't see where they were.

'Ain't there no one at home?'

'No. I've runged the bell arf off—the fam'ly's gorned out for Christmus—that's about the size on it.'

'Well, then, I shan't shoot the coals in. Wot did they horder 'em for if they warn't a-goin' to be at home to pay?'

'P'rhaps they expected 'em afore.'

'I can't 'elp that. I ain't a-goin' to leave 'em wi'out the money. Jump up, Bill, we'll get 'ome.'

I had groped my way towards the voices, but the fog was now so dense that I could hear them close to me, but couldn't see the speakers. I was just going to shout, when suddenly I felt as though the ground had given way under me. I flung up my arms, and went with a crash on something hard. I felt a violent pain in my ankle and back, I turned sick, my head swam, and then I knew no more.

But, as I fell, I distinctly caught these words:

'Put the flap on, Bill, we've left the coal-hole open.'

* * * * *

I must have lain senseless for a long time. When

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I came to myself I fancied at first I had been dreaming, and had woke up in the middle of the night in bed. But the pain in my ankle brought the real state of affairs back to me at once.

I knew that I had fallen in the fog through an unprotected aperture into a coal-cellar. I was always an exceptionally thin man, but I had never imagined I was thin enough to come to such grief as this.

Still, there I was, and so it was no use expressing surprise. The best thing I could do was to open the coal-cellar door, walk out, and explain matters to the astonished servants as well as I could.

I rose with difficulty—tried to walk, and fell. In the first place, the heap of coals on which I rested offered a very insecure footing; and, in the next, I had evidently sprained my ankle.

So I sat still at first and shouted, 'Hi! somebody——Here, I say you——Somebody, this way, please.' I kept on shouting, stopping at intervals to listen; but no answer came.

'They can't hear me,' I thought; 'they're upstairs. I must crawl to the door and open it.'

I managed to wriggle across the coals in the darkness; and after knocking my head several times against the wall, I felt a wooden surface, which I knew must be the door. In time I found the

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handle, and turned it, but the door did not yield. I soon convinced myself that it was locked on the outside.

Then I sat down, and, picking up a large lump of coal, hammered with all my might on the door.

The noise was tremendous, but no one came near. Outside the door all was silence.

Then I suddenly recollected the coalheaver's words: 'There ain't nobody at home—all the family must be gone out for Christmus!' When would they return? Slowly but surely it dawned upon me that I was locked up in the cellar of a deserted house, and I might have to pass the night there—the night—perhaps all the next day, and the next night, and the—no, good gracious! I daren't think of that. Why Boxing Day was my wedding-day—at eleven Bella would be at the altar waiting for me. Absurd! Of course I should be out before then. Somebody in the street would hear me. By Jove! the flap above could be forced out from below—why hadn't I thought of that before?

I crawled back to the centre of the coal-cellar, and in groping about found my black bag. I was glad that had fallen in with me. There were matches in it.

I managed to find them, struck a light, and

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examined my dungeon. It was a very large cellar, sparsely covered with coals. I looked up—dear me! how lofty it was! Why, from the roof to the floor it was quite twelve feet. There was absolutely nothing but a little coal in the place—not even a stick. To reach the roof and force open the flap was a work of sheer impossibility.

I sat down on a large lump of coal and began to reflect on my situation. I felt certain that my voice could not be heard outside. I shouted my hardest and listened. I couldn't hear a footstep overhead. The street, never a busy one, must be deserted. I looked at my watch. Good gracious! Past midnight! It was Christmas Day, and who would be about at that time? A police man! Ah! a policeman! I thanked heaven for the police. I began to shout, in the hope of attracting attention. I shouted till I grew black in the face. Suddenly something went snap in my throat, and I coughed till the tears ran down in streams. When I was better, I tried to shout again. All I got out was a low husky wheeze, not loud enough to frighten a mouse.

In vain I tried to raise my voice—it grew worse. My last chance of escape was cut off! Overcome with emotion, I buried my head in my hands, and lost myself in moody abstraction. I must have sat like this till I gradually sank into slumber. When

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I awoke again I was stiff and numb with cold. My head seemed swollen twice its natural size—my tongue was parched, and my ankle was terribly painful. I raised my head from a sharp block of coal on which it had been resting, and managed to find my match-box. I struck a light, and looked at my watch. It was eight o'clock! Eight o'clock on Christmas Day, and here I was still a prisoner in this horrible place.

It was too monstrous—it was too diabolical. I would get out. I seized a block of coal in one hand, and, holding the wax match in the other, hurled the block with all my strength at the door. The crash was terrific, but the door just gave a little jump, and was still. Not a timber had been started, not a joint loosened. It was a big, solid, substantial door. It was ridiculous of the builder to put such wood in a door; but he had done so. Then I beat the door with my fists. I might as well have beaten the walls.

'Let me out!' I wheezed, in a thin, husky whisper.

Bah! who could hear it? Besides, the house was empty still. There wasn't a sound of life. Evidently the family were not coming back till Boxing Day.

I began to feel hungry. I couldn't suck coal. I had never heard of that sustaining life. Horrible!

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Fancy sucking a lump of coal for your Christmas dinner!

Would anybody miss me? Would a search be made? No! I had left it in doubt whether I should go to my sister's or not. Besides, what searching would lead anybody to the coal-cellar of an empty house?

The pangs of hunger increased. I pictured to myself the long horrors of a further forty-eight hours' fast. I thrust my hand in my pocket as a man does when he is worried, and I gave a cry—no, let me be accurate—a wheeze of joy. I had there a bag of cakes which I had purchased for my nephews and nieces. I began to devour them eagerly. Then I recollected that I had bought lots of things for presents, and they were all in my black bag. Among them was a bottle of cowslip wine, purchased as an especial treat for my eldest niece, who adored it. Cakes and cowslip wine would be welcome to a hungry and thirsty man anywhere. They were doubly welcome to me in the coal-cellar that Christmas Day. I groped about for my black bag, and couldn't find it. I must strike a light. Alas! I had only one wax match left; I dare not waste it. A sudden thought struck me. I had read the 'Swiss Family Robinson,' and their wonderful expedients on a desert island. I was a Swiss Family Robinson all by myself in a

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desert coal-cellar. I must have wonderful expedients, for necessity is the female parent of invention. I took off my collar, scraped it, and pulled out the long threads of cotton, twisting them slightly together till they formed a long wick. This wick I intended to cover with the fat of the first animal I encountered and make it into a candle. Unfortunately, I found no animal. The Swiss Family Robinson were generally more fortunate. But I did not despair. I remembered that in my bag I had a box of Christmas candles for my eldest nephew.

I struck my last match bravely now, found the bag, and lit a candle, which I stuck upright on the jagged point of a large piece of coal. Then I broke the neck of the bottle of cowslip, and made a hearty meal.

I then began to mature plans for my deliverance. The Swiss Family Robinson used to hoist a shirt on a clothes-prop as a signal to passing ships. Even could I have spared the garment, and even had a clothes-prop been handy, they would have been useless in my case. My task was to get through the door, or through the flap of the coal-cellar roof. I decided on the former as most practicable.

In my bag I found a hammer, a saw, a gimlet, a pair of pincers, and a chisel. You may remember the Swiss Family Robinson generally found all

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they wanted in the boat they escaped from the wreck in.

Unfortunately, my tools were all in a half-crown box which I had bought for my youngest nephew.

The toy hammer didn't make much impression on the door. It wouldn't even drive a nail through it. So I set to work with the saw and the chisel. I worked for four hours, and then I went into a mathematical calculation of my progress.

I found that to get through the door with such tools would take me exactly thirteen years seven months five days four hours sixteen seconds and eight thirteenths. Mathematics are of great assistance to a man even in a coal-cellar. My knowledge prevented me wasting any further time in that direction.

The Abbé Faria took rather longer to get through into Monte Christo's cell, but he was not in such a hurry as I was. He hadn't an important engagement with a young lady at church.

I abandoned the door at once, and concentrated my thoughts on the roof. I must make a ladder and get up to it. Then I could push up the round metal cover and crawl out.

I took off my coat and tore it into strips. To these strips I tied my woollen comforter. I wanted twenty-four feet of material, and I soon had it.

I divided this twenty-four feet into half with a

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knife which I made out of the lid of a sardine-box, which I had in my black bag for a present to my sister. I then tore my waistcoat into twelve equal strips, and tied a strip across at intervals of a foot. My ladder was now complete; but, being a limp one, I had to get it attached to the roof with sufficient strength to bear my weight when I began to climb.

Mathematics weren't much good to me here. In vain I ransacked my brain for an idea. While I was thinking, a great big rat came out of his hole and ran across the floor. 'Eureka!' I exclaimed. I also Eurekad the rat. I caught him, and, tying a piece of string firmly round his neck, harnessed him to my ladder. I then warmed a piece of Christmas candle till it was sticky, and threw it with all my might up to the roof, first rubbing the rat's nose with it, to give him the scent. His little keen eyes watched me curiously. The piece of candle stuck right on the centre of the metal cover to the coal-cellar. The rat ran up the side of the wall at once, dragging my ladder with him. Then it ran along the roof till it reached the candle, and began to nibble. My ladder was now in a perpendicular position, but, of course, it would not bear my weight. In fact, the rat had to hold on to a ring in the centre of the flap to prevent falling himself. How was I to fix it to that ring?

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While I was thinking, the rat overbalanced himself, and fell head foremost through the ring, and hung dangling in the air, the length of the string by which he was attached to the top ring of my ladder giving him a good fall. It was a stout bit of string. Now, if I could reach the rat-end of that string my ladder was firm.

I piled all the coals in the cellar together, and, standing on the top, reached the rat and seized the string. I liberated my rodent friend, and gave him a whole candle as a reward for his services; and, attaching a piece of cord which I found in my bag to the dangling string, got length enough to attach it firmly to the handle of the door.

At last I was going to escape from my terrible position! I looked at my watch. Four o'clock! Dinner at my sister's on Christmas Day was at six. I might yet be in time to join the family party. Cautiously I mounted the first rung of the ladder. Hurrah! It bore my weight. Another! Another! Another! I had reached the ring. With every nerve quivering with excitement, with my breath coming thick and fact, I raised my hand and prepared to push up the round cover which fits into the coal-hole. I pushed—I pushed with all my might. It refused to stir. Suddenly a thought that seared my brain flashed across it! What a fool I was! Why, the weight of my body on the

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ring was holding it down. *I was trying to lift myself with my own hands.*

I forgot where I was, and stamped my foot fiercely with passion. There was a tear, a snap, and then the whole thing collapsed, and I fell with terrible violence backwards, striking my skull on a sharp piece of coal below.

* * * * * *

'Murder! Thieves! Master! Master!'

Was I awake or dreaming? I started up. Where was I? I was almost blinded by a flood of light.

'Murder! Here's a man murdered in the coal-cellar! Oh, there's blood! I'm fainting!'

There was a cry and a fall. I staggered to the open door. A servant, evidently in a swoon, lay on the threshold.

I remembered all in a moment, but I also remembered I was free. I ran out into the passage, forgetting all else but that I was free. As I darted up the kitchen stairs I caught sight of a clock—a quarter to eleven, and broad daylight!

It was Boxing morning.

I tore at the front door till I got it open, dashed out into the street, and, leaping into a passing hansom, yelled out in a hoarse whisper:

'St. Simon's Church. Five shillings if you get me there before twelve.'

The cabman hesitated a moment; then he lashed

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his horse, and we tore through the streets like mad. Everything gave way to us. The streets were thronged with holiday folks, who turned and stared aghast as we whirled past them.

I knew I must look awful. I was hatless and coatless; my shirt was black with coal grime. So was my face. I knew my head had been cut by the fall, and had bled. I must have looked terrible, but what was that to me at such a moment?

St. Simon's Church, 11.59!

I leaped from the cab and flew into the church. The cabman pursued me, demanding his fare; he clutched me by the braces. There was a sound of rending—I left them in his merciless hands. I staggered towards the altar! There were people there. I saw Aunt Rothschild. I saw a bride—Bella!—and horror! I saw a bridegroom! It was my hated rival, Jobson!

I heard Bella say, 'I will!' and then I howled aloud in my agony. I won't repeat in cold blood the word I said then. It is not often heard in church, except it occurs in the lessons. It was a nation that is mentioned frequently by Hebrew writers.

Bella turned and shrieked—Aunt Rothschild shrieked—several of the congregation fainted. They thought I was a murdered coalheaver escaped from a coroner's inquest.

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'This lady is my wife—my affianced wife!' I shrieked, as I leaned against a pillar in my grimy shirt sleeves, and pawed the air with my arms.

'Oh, dear John, how you frighten me!' said Bella. 'I'm so sorry, but I was obliged to marry some one as you didn't come! Aunt would have had her journey for nothing, and lost her four and ninepence if there had been no wedding. I knew you wouldn't like me to be disinherited, and as Mr. Jobson was in the church to see the ceremony, I thought I'd better accept his offer to be your substitute.'

'Oh!'

That was all I said. The next thing I remember was being an in-patient of St. Luke's Lunatic Asylum, and here I am now. I have told my story to lots of gentlemen, but they don't believe it. I hope you will.

* * * * * *

I have told you the old gentleman's story in his own words. I have told it to lots of people, but they don't believe it. Gentle readers, I hope you will.

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BETSY BOTHEREM.

I HAVE long had the idea of printing the following touching story as a leaflet or tract for distribution by the profession among theatrical missionaries, but I feel that its sphere of usefulness will be considerably larger if I let it appear as a contribution to the present book. The ladies and gentlemen of the profession can then distribute the volume, and the able efforts of others will aid me to carry a ray of sunshine into the darkened corners of the theatrical missionary heart.

When I first knew Miss Betsy Botherem she was a pale-faced dejected-looking young woman, and she dressed in the dowdiest way imaginable. Her boots had no heels to them, and her gloves were too big for her, and the ends of the fingers were twisted up into ugly little lumps. Miss Betsy, too, was given to sighing and groaning, especially when she saw me; for I was a dramatic author, and Miss Botherem was a theatrical missionary. She devoted

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her life to standing about stage-doors and waiting for the ballet and the chorus ladies. When they came out, she would present them with tracts and invite them to tea at the Mission Hall. Betsy was also in the habit of writing letters to actresses, and asking them if they were happy about their souls. But I need not enter into particulars. I do not suppose there will be one of my lady readers who has not at some time or other been approached by my heroine. Yes, my *heroine;* for this tract—I beg pardon, this story—is all about Betsy. She never invited me to tea, and cake, and hymns—I fear I have long ago been given up for lost by the missionaries—but I came to know all about her through a young lady in the chorus of 'The Merry Duchess' at the time that it was being played at the Royalty.

Lottie Vavasour—for obvious reasons I suppress the real name—was one of the best and brightest of the good little girls who in all winds and weathers came down to the theatre and worked like little niggers for very small salaries. (I don't like to compare ladies with niggers, but that is the only simile which occurs to me at the moment.) I know that she was the light of a happy home, that her father and mother idolized her, and that her little weekly stipend went to secure the old folks many comforts they would have had to do without

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had not Lottie put the talent Providence had given her to a good and profitable use.

One Saturday about treasury-time I happened to be outside the theatre, and I saw Lottie come along with Miss Botherem, and they were engaged in earnest conversation. Presently they shook hands and parted. Miss Vavasour evidently noticed my puzzled look, for she came up to me laughing and asked me why I looked so surprised.

I told her that I always thought she rather resented the Botherem business, and had persistently declined to be treated like a thief or an outcast, and be tempted to prayer-meetings by weak tea and sweet cake.

'Oh, I don't go to the meetings,' Lottie answered me, with a smile. 'Betsy comes to me.'

'What?'

'It's a fact. Do you know what I'm doing? I'm converting *her*.'

'I—I beg your pardon; I don't quite understand you.'

'I mean that I've seriously taken Betsy in hand.

I was going to press Lottie for a further explanation when Mr. Clay, for whom I had been waiting, came along, and Miss Vavasour, with a pleasant nod to us both, went on her way.

I forgot all about the conversion of Betsy Botherem until about a month since, when, going

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into an Alhambra rehearsal, I saw the lady herself. She came up to me, and for a moment I thought she was going to give me a tract, but her first words dispelled the allusion.

'Oh, sir, can you tell me if Miss Vavasour is in your chorus here?'

'No,' I replied; 'she is not.'

'I hope you won't think me rude, but could you tell me what has become of her?'

'To the best of my belief she's in the country with one of D'Oyley Carte's companies. I know Mr. Clay strongly recommended her to that gentleman.'

'Oh, thank you; I must try and find her address. I—I haven't seen her for some time.'

'Ah, I believe you were great friends.'

'Friends! Oh, sir, you don't know what Lottie has done for me. Haven't you'—this with a bewitching smile—'haven't you noticed a change in my appearance?'

I had indeed. The pale-faced dowdy had given place to a bright, smiling, and by no means bad-looking young woman, dressed in the very height of fashion.

'Yes,' I said, after a good look at her; 'I do indeed recognise a change, Miss Botherem.'

'Oh, I'm not Miss Botherem now. I'm Mrs. Harry Highflyer.'

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'What! you don't mean to say you've married that handsome, dashing young tenor, Harry High-flyer?'

'Yes, I have. Lottie did it all. Oh, I shall never be able to repay the dear child for all her kindness. She opened my eyes to the folly of despising everything that was pretty and merry, and nice and jolly. She took me to her home, and showed me how happy they all were there: she taught me to sing all the airs in "The Merry Duchess," instead of always droning through my nose about being a miserable sinner; and she taught me how to make the most of the features Providence had given me, and how to set my figure off, and how to make pretty dresses and bonnets for half what my ugly old frumps of gowns and coalscuttles used to cost me. Then I began to see there was something in life besides long faces and eternal wailing. I learned that there were quite as good girls on the stage as there are among General Booth's hallelujah lasses, and I left off bothering them; and at last'—there was a merry twinkle in the bright hazel eyes that looked up into my face—'at last I met Harry, and we were married, and I'm the happiest little woman under the sun. Ah, I shudder when I think what a poor miserable creature I was before Lottie Vavasour converted me.'

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'My dear Mrs. Highflyer, I congratulate you,' I said; 'I'm very pleased to hear this. I hope you'll make your story public. It may stop some of the well-meaning folks who now inundate actresses with insolent and foolish letters. Remember, all callings are sinful if they are practised with evil intent, and all callings are respectable if they are practised with a good motive. Pray make your story widely known. Good-day, Mrs. Highflyer.'

'One moment, sir. I hope you will excuse me, but I have a very good voice, and Harry doesn't mind, and if there's room in the chorus, er—er—would you say a word for me to the management of the Alhambra?'

Betsy Botherem at the Alhambra! I could not help it; I was obliged to burst out laughing. But as a matter of fact I did say a word, and at the present moment among the merry damsels who are nightly delighting vast audiences in the magnificent opera-house in Leicester Square is Mrs. Harry Highflyer, *née* Betsy Botherem, the theatrical lady missionary. Lottie Vavasour's convert does her the greatest credit. May her example be followed by all the chorus ladies who have the good of their sex at heart.

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THE AUTHOR'S GHOST.

A STORY OF 1900.

[NOTE.—I found this story among the papers of a literary friend, now deceased, who left me his executor. I must not be understood to endorse its sentiments.—G. R. S.]

HAVING been recommended by my medical adviser to take a voyage to the North Pole and stay there till I recovered my health, I left England in the year 1882. I recovered my health soon after reaching my destination. The utter inability of the myrmidons of Professor Fawcett to reach me with letters and telegrams, and the total absence of newspapers and good-natured friends, soon restored my shattered nervous system to a healthy and vigorous condition. I recovered my health, but I lost my ship in the ice, and so it came about that I remained in utter ignorance of what was going on in the world until the spring of 1900, when a special correspondent sent out by the proprietors of the *Daily Telegraph* and the *New York Herald* discovered me and brought me back in his private yacht to England, newspapers, letters, telegrams, and good-natured friends again.

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On my return, thinking I should like to see some of my old theatrical friends, I advertised my address in the *Era*. The first post after the appearance of my advertisement brought me fourteen letters. Thirteen were from gentlemen who evidently mistook me for the Actors' Benevolent Fund. The stories these unfortunates had to tell were terrible, but alas! not new. The young man who eighteen years ago had just got an engagement in the country, and only wanted five shillings to make up his fare, was still waiting for that trifling amount to restore him to fame and fortune. The broken-down old low comedian, who had been so shamefully treated by the Fund through the jealousy of an old rival on the committee, was still persecuted by that rival, and still only needed the loan of a sovereign with which to take his wardrobe out of pawn, and then the principal part in a new production was his for the asking. I was rather astonished, though, to find that little Dobbins, late sub-assistant-acting-manager, was still, through no fault of his own, penniless, with seven children, while Mrs. D. was hourly expecting the eighth. That eighth was hourly expected when I left for the North Pole. I received a letter the very day I started to say so. Mrs. D. was evidently a very patient lady to stop in a state of hourly expectation of such an event for eighteen years. I flung the letters aside with a sigh,

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murmuring, 'Oh, charity, charity, you do indeed cover a multitude of sins!' and wishing there were some means of dividing the genuine from the false in these piteous appeals for help, I sat down to my desk and began to sketch out the plot of a melodrama. 'I think,' I said to myself, 'I'll try to get a melodrama on somewhere. I have a capital idea for a good sensation scene.'

I had just set to work when a knock came at the door, and the servant announced a gentleman. 'Some old friend,' I thought; so I said, 'Show him in.' When 'him' came into my study, I started with horror. I have seen many miserable objects in my life, but none so miserable as 'him.' His face was white as death, his eyes were sunken, his frame was attenuated, and famine and despair were writ large upon his face. 'Who are you?' I asked in dismay.

'I'm a devil,' he answered in a sepulchral voice that seemed to come from a tomb concealed somewhere in his chest.

'A what?' I exclaimed with a start.

'A devil!'

'I beg your pardon, I really don't understand.'

'I give plots and incidents to popular authors, sir. Write poetry for them, drop in situations, jokes, work up their rough material; in short, sir, I devil for them. I'm the Author's Ghost. You'll

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find me very quick if you'll give me a chance, sir. My characterization is strong, dialogue nervous, repartee smart. I can turn out a drama or a comedy in a week, sir. Perfectly original. Terms very moderate. Very glad to write your next play for a fiver, sir, if you're thinking of bringing one out.'

I thought the man was queer in his head, but I determined to humour him.

'If you can do all this, my friend,' I said, 'why not do it for yourself?'

The man stared at me. 'You don't know me, sir, evidently. But you must have heard of Joggins?'

'Joggins? Ha! hem! You see, I've been out of England for eighteen years. Joggins? Why, of course, the well-known dramatist; but surely you're not the Joggins that was so famous?'

'I am indeed, sir.' The poor fellow sat down and, burying his face in his hands, wept bitterly.

I tried to soothe him.

'My poor fellow,' I said softly, 'don't weep, but tell me how you, whom I left a famous dramatist, come to be in this painful condition?'

'I will, sir, as soon as I've controlled my emotion.'

I waited, and presently, the emotion being controlled, Joggins told me his story.

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'You see, sir, when you left England I was writing melodrama, making success after success, and the money was rolling in. The public came to see my plays, and liked them. I always was fond of sensation scenes, you know, and there was generally one in my pieces.'

'Yes, I remember; you had a sinking ship in one, I think, and a railway collision in another, and a house on fire, and all that sort of thing. Wonderful successes, if I remember rightly.'

'They were, sir; but all of a sudden some of the critics turned dead against sensation. Wanted poetry and all that sort of thing instead. Declared everything that didn't happen every day in an ordinary family was low and vulgar, and only fit for a fourpenny gallery.'

'Yes, I remember; there was a crusade against sensation and melodramatic effects coming when I left.'

'Ah, sir, after you left it got fearful. The way the newspapers attacked a man who had even a fight or a rescue in his play was awful. The epithets they flung at him, the abuse they showered on him! Why, if he'd been a pickpocket or a murderer they couldn't have assailed him with more violence. It was nothing that the theatre was packed nightly to see such plays. Theatres weren't established to make money: they were

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great moral teachers, elevators, art academies, poetry-classes, and all that sort of thing.

'Well, sir, to make my story short, having a wife and family I was obliged to go on at what I did best, so I continued to produce plays with sensation scenes. I used to hide in the daytime then, and only crawl out at night, because the abuse got so terrible that little boys in the street took it up and called names after me. The managers got frightened at last, and were afraid to produce my pieces, though they had always paid. They didn't care to be branded as felons themselves, or as vile debasers of the public intellect; and so when the notices got too hot even for them, they dropped me. One manager, however, stuck to me and brought out a play. It had a sensation scene in it. When the scene came, one of the critics got up and ordered the play to stop. You remember something of the sort was done many years before with a piece called *It's Never too Early to Tear*, only the author was a big literary man, and a plucky one, and he wouldn't be put down. The manager was quite frightened. He felt his reputation would be ruined, and he stopped my play and put on a charade out of *The Girl's Own Keepsake* instead.

'Since then, sir,' added the poor fellow with a fresh outburst of grief, 'I've been an outcast. The children in the street point at me and say, "Yah,

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who wrote sensation plays?" No respectable lodging-house keeper will have me; the other lodgers leave directly they recognise me. If I go into a coffee-shop the other people all go out. The writing of sensational pieces was so terribly criticized that at last the public began to think I must be a depraved inhuman monster, or the critics dare not call me such terrible names. Driven out of society, shunned by the managers, hounded down by the press, my own wife ashamed of me, my own children blushing to think I was their father, I became a miserable, hopeless, ruined outcast, a social leper; and to earn a few coppers and keep body and soul together, I devil. Won't you try me, sir? Come, I'll write you a drama for a sovereign!'

'I don't want your drama,' I said, 'but here is a sovereign. Good-bye!'

I held out my hand and took his trembling palm sympathetically. He broke down again.

'What,' he exclaimed, 'you—you take my hand? You are not ashamed to touch a miserable wretch who once wrote sensational melodramas! Oh, this is too much!'

The overstrained heart burst with joy. The poor 'devil' fell dead at my feet.

I went out to arrange for the inquest. It was difficult to get a jury when it was known who he was. The Church, when it came out in evidence

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that he had written sensational pieces, refused him Christian burial. He was interred at midnight where four cross-roads met, after his body had been burned in quicklime. The common hangman performed the ceremony, and left the grave with these words: 'He wrote sensational plays—may the Lord have mercy on his soul!'

I attended the funeral. When I returned home I carefully burned the plot of my sensational melodrama, and commenced adapting 'How doth the little busy bee.' There is a sermon on pure milk in it, and a charming scene between two infants in their cradles. I want fame and the esteem of my neighbours; heaven forbid that I should write sensation, become a social leper, and be buried at four cross-roads!

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THE FATAL SNEEZE.

I AM passionately fond of plum-pudding!

When I say plum-pudding, I mean plum-pudding. Lots of people who call a spade a spade call that which is decidedly not plum-pudding by the name honoured of all Englishmen as the national sweet, or pastry, or *entremet*, or whatever its proper designation is upon the menu.

Entremet! No. Never shall even wild horses drag from me that foreign kickshaw title for the plum-pudding of Old England. Some people go in for the Roast Beef of Old England, and swear by it. They will tell you that the Englishman owes his place among the races of the world to his habit of eating roast beef from his childhood upwards. I don't believe it. I maintain that England's greatness is based firmly and solidly upon plum-pudding. No race not intended to survive as the fittest would ever have gone on eating plum-pudding for generations as the English have.

Frenchmen or Germans would have died of

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dyspepsia. I have nearly died of dyspepsia several times, and it has generally been after plum-pudding and on Christmas Day. That is the only day I eat it. Perhaps, all things considered, it is just as well. I said a little way above that everybody doesn't know what plum-pudding is. There are misguided individuals who make their pudding a day or two before Christmas, and fancy that is the real article. Mine is always kept a whole year. I have my plum-pudding made exactly 365 days before I want to eat it; and for luck I always go down into the kitchen and have just one stir.

There are a good many stirs in my kitchen. There was a stir the other day when the kitchen-boiler burst and blew the cook and the cat up, and frightened us all out of our seven senses. Having been blown up once, we couldn't blow the cook up again; but I often think that kitchen-boilers and cooks have altered the English character. Our forefathers didn't have kitchen boilers, and they lived much longer and were more contented. The fair châtelaine of the dear dead-and-gone days of knights and drawbridges and chivalry might have had her troubles, but she never dreamed of a kitchen boiler, and her cook was never troublesome. At least, one never reads of a dame of the Middle Ages having hysterics because the cook had taken her by the shoulders and put her out of the

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kitchen. There is no case on record—and I have spent three days at the British Museum in order to make sure—of a cook in the Middle Ages drinking the brandy intended for the sauce, putting on her bonnet, and giving notice that she was going to leave there and then, at two o'clock on a Christmas Day, with company coming at six, and the turkey not so much as put to the fire. I've heard of a case of that sort lately, but never in the Middle Ages.

Yes, they had plum-puddings in the Middle Ages, and mighty big ones, too; and they had other famous dishes as well—dishes that we dare not think of now, because we are a degenerate race. Why, the whole College of Physicians would run out and read the Riot Act if English men and women sat down to such a meal as our ancestors attacked gallantly.

But the march of intellect, the spread of effeminacy, the decay of physique, and the general sitting down of the free-born Briton in the lap of luxury have been quite unable to demolish plum-pudding. It stands to-day, as proudly as of yore, the national dish of this great and mighty country—it is the central figure in our rough island story, especially when that story is a Christmas one.

And that, by-the-bye, reminds me that this is a

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Christmas Story, and that, if it is to be told this year, I had better be getting on with it.

My story is about plum-pudding, so that I cannot be said to have wandered from my subject. This is a perfectly true story. If it were not, I would certainly not send it to my good friends, the publishers of this volume, whose regard for strict accuracy is proverbial. It was they who had a most expensive illustration destroyed, and another one prepared, because a living celebrity who figured in it had his hair parted on the left side, whereas they knew that the living celebrity invariably parted his hair on the right side. It is not to such a man that I would offer a story which deviated from fact by a hair's breadth. At any rate, the hair must be on the right side.

It was the evening of Christmas Day, in the year 1876, that, having dined, and, alas! yielded to the temptation, when the plum-pudding came, of repeating the immortal words of Oliver Twist, I retired to my study. Christmas is a genial season, and any well-disposed man who has little nephews and nieces would glory in romping with them after dinner. To carry two heavy boys and a particularly plump little girl round the dining-room on his back, pretending that he was a gee-gee, and crawling on all-fours, while three pairs of remarkably thick little boots prodded him viciously in the ribs to make him

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go faster, is just the sort of thing which a good-tempered man would glory in doing after his Christmas dinner. Alas! I am not good-tempered; therefore I declined the equine metamorphosis proposed, and retired to my den. I folded my hands across my—well, say chest; and presently I slumbered sweetly.

I have never seen myself slumber, but, until I have evidence to the contrary, I shall continue to believe that sweetly is the correct description.

How long I slept I do not know; but presently I was aroused by a gentle tapping close to my ear.

I started, rubbed my eyes, and looked round the room.

Tap! Tap! Tap!

The noise came from the wall. Some one in the next house was tapping the wall. But why? People don't hang pictures or put in ventilators on Christmas night.

Tap! Tap! Tap!

I listened. I have heard people tap at the wall many times, and never thought anything about it; but on this occasion the noise attracted me—fascinated me, that is the word.

Why was somebody tapping at the wall in the next house on Christmas night? I placed my ear to the wall and listened. Then I heard a grating sound. It was quite close. There couldn't be

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more than a brick between my ear and the instrument that was making the noise.

What impelled me to do it I can't think, but I put my lips quite close to the wall, and was about to whisper, 'What is it?' when I drew back suddenly.

As my lips approached the wall-paper it yielded! The brick on the other side had been loosened, and was being drawn in.

Instinctively I looked at my watch. It was past midnight. My family had evidently come into the study, seen me fast asleep, and left me.

For a minute I wondered what I should do. I began to feel a little nervous. Should I run upstairs and get some one to come and watch the *dénouement* with me, or should I see it out alone? I would see it out alone!

I turned the gas up full, and, seizing the poker, waited. I had an idea that it might be a burglar; but I had never heard of a burglar pulling out the bricks on Christmas night to get into a house, because he must have got into the next house first, to do it, and that was rather a roundabout way.

Presently the paper shook violently, and I heard a fall of plaster on the other side. The noise continued, now growing louder and louder, and then I could hear that the last brick was being drawn out.

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The paper cracked and tore. I stooped down to see if there was a hole I could peep through, and, as I did so, a long lean arm, bare to the elbow, came gliding slowly through the aperture.

The poker fell from my hand. A cold perspiration stood upon my brow. I tried to speak, but my voice failed me.

Slowly, that long, lean, bare arm came farther and farther into my room. The hand opened and felt about as if in search of something.

Nerved with a sudden bravery, I leant forward and seized it. It closed spasmodically upon my wrist—held me with a grip of iron.

'Leave go!' I stammered. 'Leave go! Who are you?—what do you want?'

A hollow voice—a voice I shall never forget—answered from the other side:

'You are the instrument of my vengeance—ask no more.'

'But I must ask more,' I exclaimed. 'This is monstrous! What right have you to make holes in my wall and seize me in this very impertinent manner? Good heavens! what are you doing?'

This last exclamation was one of horror. The man on the other side was slowly dragging my arm through the aperture.

'Leave go!' I shouted. 'Help! help!'

There was a mocking laugh from the other side.

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'Shout as much as you like,' answered the hollow voice. 'Your house is empty. Don't you know that your family are spending Christmas evening here? They are upstairs, in the drawing-room, now.'

Of course they were.

I recollected that we were all going in to a Christmas-tree at Dr. Parker's, our next-door neighbour, in the evening. I had fallen asleep in my library, and forgotten the invitation. There was no one in the house with me; my nephews and nieces had long ago been taken home, sleepy and tired; the servants had gone into Dr. Parker's, too.

I was alone in the house.

Alone in one house, with my hand and arm in another.

My cries would not be heard in the next house upstairs. The situation was terrible. Here was some lunatic, utterly unknown to me, who had my hand and arm at his mercy, and I could not see who or what he was. I could not even see what he was going to do with my imprisoned limb.

Suddenly a cold shiver ran through my veins.

Dr. Parker, I had heard, had a new assistant—a youth who was mad on the subject of experiments. Good gracious! Perhaps he was going to cut my arm off. The worst of it was, I could not see. There might be a sharp saw in the madman's hand

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at this very moment. Suddenly I felt my hand grasped firmly, and a piece of string wound round the forefinger.

'You are the instrument of my vengeance!' exclaimed the hollow voice again, in a tone which plainly showed he was satisfied with his preliminary arrangements. 'Your finger is attached to a string. The slightest muscular action on your part will jerk that string and release the spring of an infernal machine, which will blow this house and everyone in it to atoms. I shan't be in it. I'm going out. A merry Christmas to you, and a happy New Year.'

I was drawn so closely to the wall that the side of my face touched it. I could not move my head or look down to see what was being done. I only heard the retreating footsteps of the maniac, and that the door closed behind him.

There was plenty of room for me to have withdrawn my arm, but how could I do it? The string firmly attached to my finger would have been drawn too, and the infernal machine would have gone off.

I burst into a cold perspiration as I thought over the situation. I began to tremble, but checked myself instantly. The mere trembling of my fingers might jerk the string.

I held myself rigid. The effort to keep my arm

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motionless induced a strange tingling in the veins. I was going to have pins and needles. My arm began to feel numb and stiff. I felt that I must move it or die.

But still I bit my lip, and endured the pain.

The lives of an entire household, the lives of my own family, were literally in my hands.

I began to wonder who the maniac could be, and what could have induced him to make me the victim of such a dastardly outrage.

At that moment a pang of horror shot through my heart. I felt the strange tickling sensation that is the herald of an approaching sneeze.

A sneeze would shake my entire body. It always does. It would jerk my arm, and then—— It was too terrible. I held my breath. I clenched my teeth. I did all I could to avert that fatal sneeze, but slowly and surely it gained upon me.

I lived a hundred years in ten seconds. The fatal moment approached. I shut my eyes—I gasped—and then—I SNEEZED!

Atishoo!

I gave a wild start—I leaped in the air—I looked around me. I was in my library-chair. Nothing had been moved. The sneeze had awakened me suddenly. It was about time.

I have never had twice of plum-pudding since Christmas Day, 1876.

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A PROMISING DRAMATIST.

THE facts of the following story are known to myself, the chaplain of —— Gaol, and about half a dozen other persons, friends and relatives of the deceased.

You will gather from this that my hero is a dead man. He was hanged for a murder committed under singularly atrocious circumstances not many years ago.

Truth is stranger than fiction. No industrious manufacturer of shilling dreadfuls ever imagined a situation in which a man, ambitious for literary and dramatic success, would make his first hit as a playwright on the night before his execution, and read the laudatory criticisms in the condemned cell while waiting for the executioner.

Such was the fate of one whose identity I will conceal under the name of Percy Dornton. I make no apology for introducing his strange life-story to the readers of this volume. As he was a dramatist, his tragic fate must be worthy the attention of all

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who are interested in the shifting and varied scenes of theatrical life.

* * * * * *

At the age of five-and-twenty Percy Dornton was friendless. His parents were dead, and he had worn his other relatives out by repeated applications for money, which was spent in cheap dissipation. With a certain rough-and-ready talent, a good address, and an insinuating manner, Dornton managed to impose himself upon a limited number of acquaintances as a clever fellow, who only wanted a chance to get on in the world. He had been to America, and he boasted of his acquaintance with the famous literary men and the well-known actors of the States. He was on nodding terms with a few of the comedians and literary men who are to be found occasionally in the bars and smoking-rooms of the Strand. With these gentlemen he passed for one of the great unacted. He had written a comedy and a drama, which would undoubtedly be produced at once if he could only get an introduction to a manager. But no one would oblige. Most of the literary men who nodded to Dornton had a play of their own, which was being kept from the footlights by the dramatic ring, and the comedians were too used to similar requests to take any notice of this one.

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After a year's knocking about the Strand and Fleet Street Dornton disappeared. No one knew what had become of him, and no one took the trouble to inquire. Several of his former acquaintances had obliged him with a temporary loan of a few shillings, and it was presumed that, having obtained all he could, he kept out of the way to avoid being asked to return it.

As a matter of fact, Dornton was hard at work finishing his comedy; for the long-expected chance had come. A distant relative of his, an actor, had returned from America, and had obtained an engagement at a London theatre. Soon afterwards Dornton met him, and learned that the management was in want of a comedy. The actor altered it a little here and there, bringing his practical experience to bear on the play, and then took it to the management as the work of Mr. ——, the *nom de théâtre* which Dornton had selected as the one he would make famous. For obvious reasons I refrain from revealing that name here.

The manager of the theatre took the play, promised to read it, and put it in his desk. There it lay unopened for many weeks, in company with a dozen other new and original comedies, the authors of which, like Dornton, only wanted 'a chance' to set the Thames on fire, and to don the mantle that fell from the shoulders of Sheridan, and which

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had remained so long locked up in the theatrical wardrobe.

Dornton imagined that his comedy would be accepted at once. He was eager to see the name of —— in huge letters on the hoardings; he bought a book for newspaper cuttings, and prepared it to receive the criticisms of his *chef-d'œuvre*. But days and weeks went on, and he heard nothing. He hunted his relative up every day, but could get no satisfactory answer; the management had promised to read it. The actor couldn't hold the management down in a chair and insist upon the promise being carried out. At last Dornton abandoned all hope, looked upon his play as lost to sight, to memory dear, and determined to leave it a little longer and then get it back again.

In the mean time he wanted money. He was being pressed by an ugly creditor—a man who had lent him £10 in the joint name of himself and a householder who had signed a promissory note as security. The signature was a forgery, and the creditor knew it.

One day, under circumstances which I shall not relate, because the details of the crime would enable the reader to identify the murderer, Dornton found himself alone with a gentleman who had money about him; the gentleman was asleep. A desperate idea flashed across the wretched fellow's brain that

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he could rob the gentleman and escape unnoticed. He made an attempt, but the gentleman awoke; there was a fierce struggle, cries for help, and then —murder! Dornton, maddened by fear, silenced his victim and accuser at last, and fled, a murderer, from the scene of his crime.

* * * * * *

For some time the crime remained a mystery. Dornton eluded the vigilance of the police, but at last he was captured, taken before a magistrate, and committed for trial.

One of his first visitors was his actor-relative. Dornton entreated him to keep the secret of his being the writer of the comedy, but to endeavour to sell it to the management for a sum that would help him to obtain good legal assistance at the trial. The actor, by a superhuman effort, induced the manager to read the comedy; it was liked, accepted, and a sum paid down for it. This the actor handed to Dornton's friends, who had interested themselves in his defence. The trial came on; Dornton was found guilty, and sentenced to be hanged.

For some days then his play had been in rehearsal. The manager understood that the author was abroad, and could not be consulted about anything. That was the explanation of the actor who had brought the MS. to the theatre. On the night

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before the execution of Dornton his play was produced, and was a success.

The following morning the unhappy man made an unusual request.

He earnestly begged to be allowed to see a morning paper. The request was granted, and they brought him a *Daily Telegraph*. He turned eagerly to the notice, and read it through. This was the last paragraph of an exceedingly favourable notice:

'The comedy betrays now and again the touch of an inexperienced hand. The author is probably a young man; he will improve greatly upon this initial effort. In fact, looking at the excellence of the dialogue, and the cleverness of the characterization, and the remarkable constructive skill displayed, it is not rash to prophesy that the young author of —— has a brilliant career before him.'

Dornton read the words slowly aloud. For a moment his lip trembled, then he recovered his self-possession, put the paper aside, and turned to the chaplain, who was waiting to administer to him the consolations of religion.

Half an hour afterwards the black flag was hoisted on the prison roof, and the young dramatic author with 'a brilliant career before him' had paid the penalty of his crime.

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UNCLE JOHN.

I HAD a near relative who for years was a never-ending source of amusement to me. He had strongly marked peculiarities and idiosyncrasies. From the first day that I managed, by a stroke of good fortune, to obtain admission to 'the dramatic ring' (I believe the expression is still fashionable among the great unacted), I marked him out as a splendid 'character' for a comedy. I felt sure that if I could only reproduce him upon the stage there was money in him. Unfortunately there was a difficulty in the way. My relative was a man quick to take offence, and slow to forgive an impertinence He demanded more than respect from his friends and connections; he insisted upon reverence. He was, moreover, an old man and a wealthy one, and he had given me to understand that, if I behaved myself, his fortune would some day pass to me; if I did not, it would go to the Dogs' Home. Now I am always anxious to benefit deserving institutions, but I am human as well as humane, and I was un-

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able to resist the idea that to inherit under a wealthy man's will must be a very pleasant sensation. There arose in my mind a great conflict. On the one hand I was burning to put my esteemed relative on the stage, and, on the other hand, I was most anxious to do nothing which would alienate his affection and drive him to the dogs. At last the moment came when I could no longer resist introducing him to the footlights. I had the plot of a comedy constructed, and I knew that such a character as my relative would do much towards making it a success. For the purposes of explanation, I will here call him 'Uncle John.' While I was cogitating, and weighing the pros and cons carefully in my mind, a lucky chance favoured my scheme. Uncle John called upon me to say that he had been ordered by his physicians to travel for the benefit of his health, and that he was about to start on an extended European trip. I bade him an affectionate *bon voyage*, and set to work gleefully at my comedy. He was gone; he would be away for more than a year; the danger was removed, for he would not see my play and discover how faithfully I had held the mirror up to the weak points of his nature. I felt sure that a British audience would roar with delight at the many eccentricities of Uncle John.

Two months after his departure from our shores

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the comedy was produced at a metropolitan theatre. Uncle John was the success of the play. The audience relished him, and roared at him. The press complimented me on the creation of a novel and highly diverting character. No one relished Uncle John more than I did. Night after night I stood at the back of the dress circle, and chuckled and rubbed my hands. But my delight was cut prematurely short. On the hundredth night of the play I occupied a private box. Glaring down at the grinning faces of the audience, my eye was riveted by one solemn face in the middle of the pit. That face never once relaxed into a smile—it wore a stern and vicious look that struck terror to my soul. It was the face of Uncle John.

The next morning there lay upon my breakfast table a letter. I recognised the handwriting on the envelope, and I opened it with fear and trembling. It ran as follows:

'MY DEAR NEPHEW,

'I returned to town for a few days to settle some legal business. I took the opportunity of seeing your play. I am sorry that you should think it worth while to hold me up to the ridicule of the mob. I have no doubt I am the idiot you depict, but I am not quite such a fool as you make me in the last act. There, I forgive those

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who have made a butt of me. In real life, my dear nephew, I do nothing of the sort, as my "last act and deed" will testify. I understand you receive £5 a night for the play which you have manufactured out of my infirmities of character. I shall charge you ten times that amount for the hire of my personality. The play has been performed 100 times; I have deducted £5,000 from the sum I had intended to leave you. I shall deduct a further £50 for every future performance of your personal insult to myself. God bless you. Go on and prosper.

'Your affectionate

'UNCLE JOHN.'

I went at once to my uncle's house. He had not been there; he was staying at an hotel. I went to the hotel; he had left for Dover, *en route* for the Continent again. Then I went to the management, and requested them to withdraw the play. They refused, and, by the terms of my agreement, I had no power to alter their decision. The play ran for another 100 nights. Another £5,000 gone from my inheritance. Acquaintances met me, and congratulated me: 'By Jove, old fellow, you must be making a fortune!' they exclaimed. Making a fortune! Confound them, I was losing one! £10,000 had slipped through my fingers, and had

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gone to the Dogs' Home. Home! why, a perfect palace awaited the tykes who would benefit under my uncle's will. At last the play was withdrawn. A week afterwards I received another note from Uncle John:

'DEAR NEPHEW,

'From the £15,000 I had originally left you I have deducted the sum of £10,500. If you reckon up the nights "I" ran, you will, I think, find this correct.'

I flung the letter into the fire, and cursed the hour that I was tempted to make dramatic capital out of Uncle John.

* * * * * *

A year went by, and I became reconciled to my loss. There was still £4,500 to come to me under uncle's will. That was something; at least that was safe from the voracious bow-wows. I went on with my stage work, and produced more plays, but I was exceedingly careful not to take my characters from my family circle. I had learnt a bitter lesson. At the end of the year I had almost forgotten my prospective loss, and was able to look at a dog without a feeling of enmity. One day, walking along the Strand, I met the manager of the theatre at which the fatal comedy had been produced.

'Hullo! old fellow!' he exclaimed; 'I was just

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going to write to you. We are going to revive your *Uncle John*, and I think we shall get another three months out of it.'

He did. My remonstrances were in vain. The London right was his for three years. At the end of the revival a long-expected letter arrived from abroad. It was very short.

'MY DEAR NEPHEW,

'It's all gone to the dogs now. God bless you.

'UNCLE JOHN.'

'Hang the dogs!' I cried, as I flung the letter from me, and clenched my fists in impotent rage. Then I took up another letter—an official-looking affair—and opened it mechanically. It was from the Commissioners of Income Tax, and they had clapped another £2,000 on to my assessment on account of the profits arising from the performances of *Uncle John*. I have been out of town for the benefit of my health ever since, and I am not myself yet. Uncle John died a month ago, and they tell me that the animals at the Dogs' Home wear silver collars, and have lamb chops for dinner every day. They say the drama is going to the dogs: my comedy went there, at any rate.

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SNAP ON TOUR.

PEOPLE who tell stories about dogs are generally regarded with an eye of suspicion. The sagacity of animals once started as a topic of conversation, it is not long before the family wit or the club funny man sees his opportunity for discharging an anecdotal rocket, which sails so far away into the clouds of romance that everybody is in duty bound to cry 'Oh!' I do not wish to force from my readers the exclamatory chorus traditionally associated with the Crystal Palace slopes on firework night. This is not a rocket. Neither is it a squib. It is the true and unvarnished history of a very worthy member of a travelling theatrical company. History! Pshaw! The history of an artist can only be properly written after his retirement from the stage, and Snap is only a young beginner. He has only just completed his third tour, and is now rehearsing for a pantomime engagement at the Prince of Wales's Theatre, Liverpool.

Snap is a dog, a young white-and-lemon fox-

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terrier, and he enacts the *rôle* of the blind man's cur in *Cruel Carmen*, which is one of the burlesques played by Mr. Alfred Hemming's *Mother-in-Law* Company.

Snap and I are great friends. It is our fate occasionally in various parts of the country to have a beautiful, well-ventilated, and commodious provincial dressing-room all to ourselves. Snap generally guards his master's cast-off wardrobe by lying on it, while I sit on a hat-box waiting for Mr. Hemming, and fill up the time by wondering what extra risk Life Insurance Companies would charge if they knew in what draughty death-traps some of their clients have to pass a large portion of their lives.

Imagine a Turkish bath, with sixteen distinct and separate draughts and a——but this is digression. Many of my readers know a great deal more about provincial dressing-rooms than I can tell them. But they don't know what I know about Snap, so I fancy it will be better that I should return to him at once.

One of the most wonderful things about Snap is his faculty for finding his way straight to the theatre of a provincial town to which he has never been before. The first time the company went to Newcastle he was lost at the station. Nothing was seen of him during the day. The curtain went down on the comedy, but still there was no Snap.

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'He's lost this time,' exclaimed his master; 'poor Snap!' The burlesque commenced, and right in the middle of it Master Snap comes bounding upstairs to the dressing-room, just in time to miss his cue by a minute.

It was not his fault. It was ascertained afterwards that he'd gone to the Tyne Theatre instead of the Theatre Royal, and after seeing two acts of the *Orange Girl*, had discovered that it must be the wrong house, as he had never seen *Mother-in-Law* played like that before.

He left the Tyne Theatre hurriedly and arrived at the Royal panting, and his horror as he dashed past the wings and heard his cue, knowing that he couldn't possibly make up in time, was so intense that he gave vent to a prolonged howl.

The entire company will vouch for this story, and are ready to be taken in two cabs to the nearest Commissioner for taking oaths and affidavits by anyone producing a professional card.

When Snap was at Liverpool he made the acquaintance of another theatrical dog who was staying in the same 'diggings.'

The two dogs went out every day together, and Snap took his friend round with him on his usual tour. The said usual tour, by-the-by, is another of Snap's peculiarities. He has found out the dinner-hour of every individual member of the company,

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and it is seldom indeed that one or other of the ladies and gentlemen does not have the pleasure of a visit from Mr. Snap just as the knives and forks are about. If the front door is not open, Snap barks and whines until somebody comes.

When I go down to the country I stay at an hotel as a rule. I have said that Snap and I are great friends. We invariably cement that friendship over a bone and a few titbits in the coffee-room. Snap is very partial to hotel life, and after dinner he invariably finds his way to the hotel kitchen. At the Queen's Hotel, Birmingham, he did so well that not being in the bill he stayed all night, slept with one of the waiters, and came downstairs in the morning to breakfast, had another few hours in the kitchen, came into the coffee-room to dinner, and then walked straight out of the house and went to the theatre.

Why didn't he stay all night again?

Because it was Friday; and on that evening *Cruel Carmen* was put up again for Mr. Hemming's benefit, and Snap had to go on.

How he knew it I can't tell. The fact had been largely advertised on the hoardings, and he must have seen it there.

I have wandered, however, from Liverpool to Birmingham without narrating what happened at the former town, where my hero had a chum.

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One night in the burlesque, Snap, who usually got through his part as quickly as possible, and shook off his costume before his tail was well out of sight of the audience, hung back upon the stage and did a little frisk on his own account. Then he trotted down to the footlights and seemed to be scanning the audience. Suddenly from the back of the pit there was a loud 'Bow, wow, wow.' No sooner did Snap hear it than he wagged his tail and retired.

He had invited his friend the other dog to come in and see his performance.

Snap is a great favourite at all the provincial theatres, and always manages to evade the standing order, 'No dogs allowed behind the scenes.' You can't well stop one of the company, and the most obdurate doorkeeper has to give way when he learns that Snap plays a part. He doesn't get into much mischief, but I cannot refrain from relating one little adventure which got him into rather bad odour for a time.

At the Grand Theatre, Leeds, Mr. Wilson Barrett's magnificent house, which Londoners never see without wishing it could be transported like Aladdin's flying palace, Snap got into trouble. It was his custom to spend the evening in the refreshment saloon at the back of the pit. I think there were biscuits about, but there was a rat there also; and

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if anything can make Snap neglect business and miss his cue it is a rat.

One evening Snap, busy searching after a rat, was lost sight of when shutting-up time came, and got locked in the refreshment-room all night.

Later on when the fireman came round he heard a noise, opened the door, and there he found Snap still busy at a hole, to get at which he had bitten right through the gas-pipe! In a theatre where less admirable precautions are taken Snap might have been blown up there and then. As it was, he got his blowing-up by himself later on instead of sharing it with the theatre.

At Sheffield this merry young performer gave a fresh proof of his singular intelligence. The company were playing a cricket match, and Snap got hit by the ball. He turned nasty, showed his teeth, and went home. But 'home' was a long way farther than the lazy fellow cared to walk on a hot day. So he just waited for the tramcar, which passed the field, got under the seat, and hopped out at the top of his street.

Mr. Hemming found it out on the following day from the conductor, who, recognising the dog, told him the story.

At Liverpool Snap fell in love. Love may make even the most conscientious artist forgetful. It made Snap forget to come home in time to go with

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the company to Manchester. When he did return, the landlady, who had received his master's instructions, gave him to the guard to take on by the next train. But Snap was not a faithless gallant who loves and goes away by train. He was duly sent to the theatre, but the next day he walked down to the station, got into the train, and returned to Liverpool, where he was discovered sitting down on his haunches outside the house of his Juliet and plaintively lifting up his voice. I have no doubt he was giving off one of Romeo's best speeches in dog-language.

In Edinburgh Snap met with an accident. He was run over, and his leg was injured; but he declined to disappoint his audience for such a trifle. He went through his part like a hero, with the wounded limb in splints and a starch bandage. He might perhaps have begged off, but everyone was talking at the time of the fortitude of Mr. Charles Warner, who was playing Michael Strogoff nightly with his arm in a sling. I am sure the young and accomplished Adelphi star will be the first to appreciate the effect of his noble example on a humble brother-actor.

The learned Bishop who some time since descanted on the evil influence of the stage, arguing that performers became in time imbued with the art of deception which they practised, will perhaps,

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should he read this little narrative, thank me for the following anecdote. Snap, doubtless influenced by the fact that for some 300 nights he had pretended to be what he was not (a blind man's dog), one morning carried the art of simulation into everyday life. He had been thrown into the Trent for a bath by Mr. Julian Cross, the Alderman Jones of the provinces, and Snap found the Trent as cold as the dress-circle audience in a Dissenting town. He hurried out, and was about to be thrown in again, when he lifted his front leg and limped, howled as if he were suffering the most excruciating agony. 'Poor fellow!' exclaimed his master to Mr. Cross; 'don't throw him in again, he's got the cramp.' No sooner, however, was the river left behind than Snap put his leg down, wagged his tail, and frisked off briskly, evidently delighted at the success of his little *ruse*.

These are but a few of the incidents in the career of this promising young provincial performer. At present his histrionic efforts have been confined to burlesque; but do not imagine he is contented with such a mediocre walk of art. He has several times made an unexpected appearance in *Crutch and Toothpick*, but his desire to shine in genuine comedy has not been appreciated by the company. Such is a brief outline of the career of my friend Snap. He is a dog who will go far, and great things may

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be expected of him before he takes his last benefit and retires from the boards to babble of green-baize. He, I am sure, when the footlights know him no more, will not join in the chorus often raised by two-legged veterans in his profession and complain that the drama is going to the dogs. He has too much respect for his species to say that.

I am not sure that some day, when he has become a star, I may not measure him for a well-fitting part and write a comedy specially for him. I read the other day in an American paper that the great success of a certain play was, that it was so full of 'Snap.' When the comedy I speak of comes to be written, I fancy there will be plenty of Snap in that too. He won't be a real star if he doesn't insist upon having the play pretty well to himself.

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CHURCH AND STAGE.

EXTREMES meet much more frequently in real life than they do in fiction. The fictionist generally brings extremes together for the purpose of exciting our mirth by a remarkable contrast. No one has been more successful in obtaining ludicrous situations out of the meeting of extremes than the author of the 'Bab Ballads.' Incongruity has been the device upon his literary banner, and, thanks to the perfect art and exquisite finish of his style, he has carried that banner to victory again and again. The extremes that met first, if I remember rightly, in the pages of *Fun* when poor Tom Hood sat so comfortably in the editorial chair, have met again and again upon the stage of the Opéra Comique and the Savoy, and have never failed to provoke a British audience to mirth.

But in real life, except on rare occasions, there is more pathos than humour in the meeting of extremes. There is tragedy, not comedy, in the spectacle of Lazarus shivering upon the doorstep of

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Dives—starving for a crust of bread, while the feast that costs a fortune is spread within, for a dozen dyspeptic millionnaires, who pay their doctors golden guineas for 'something to give me an appetite, don't you know.' It is a subject for sorrow and not for mirth, when the daughter of a hundred earls, fair and innocent and happy, steps from her carriage to enter the gaily-lighted theatre, and rubs elbows as she passes with the poor painted daughter of the night. It is strong drama, not screaming farce, when the weary work-girl toils far into the night for a starvation wage at the costly robes which a fashionable Phryne will wear for a few short hours on the morrow, spoil with a spilt glass of 'fizz,' and fling aside.

These rambling thoughts upon the meeting of extremes occur to me as I finish reading an article upon 'Church and Stage' in one of the weekly periodicals. Certain clergymen of late have been induced to write testimonials for plays; and the fact suggests to the writer the idea that some day the stage may reciprocate the compliment, and write testimonials for certain preachers. The clergyman may rely upon the patronage of the clown. 'The clergyman and the clown!' The idea is meant to raise a smile by its incongruity—it is a meeting of extremes. Our mind's eye pictures one of those inimitable little sketches signed 'Bab.'

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We see the Rev. Ebenezer Jones walking arm-in-arm with Sandy Boleno Brown. The clergyman has a great white tie and cast-up eyes, and carries Watts' Hymns under his arm. The clown, in full motley, turns in his knees and sticks out his tongue; a red-hot poker protrudes from one pocket, while into the other he is endeavouring to ram a leg of mutton and a string of sausages, purloined from the butcher's shop they are passing. It is very funny, this idea of the godly curate and the larcenous clown as Damon and Pythias. In the realm of fancy the companionship would only be brought about to make us laugh heartily. In real life, I have said, the meeting of extremes is more frequently pathetic than humorous; and the story I am going to tell is that of the constant companionship of a clergyman and a clown. When I have finished, you shall tell me if it is not a story for tears rather than laughter.

One day last year I was personally conducted over a well-known lunatic asylum. It was a fine afternoon, and many of the patients were in the grounds. I mixed freely with them, and conversed with those who, spying a stranger, hastened to find a confidant for their troubles. They were all of them perfectly sane; they had been brought to the asylum because they were in somebody's way. One buxom young woman had been torn from her

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parents because the Prince of Wales had arranged to elope with her, and it was most important that she should go home again, as the Prince was waiting at Westminster Abbey for her, with the Archbishop of Canterbury, and he would be wondering why she didn't come to marry him as arranged. It was her sister who had had her put away; her sister was also in love with the Prince. I was compelled to decline the poor girl's request to knock the man at the gates down, and carry her off in a swift hansom to Westminster; but I accepted a letter to his Royal Highness, which I promised to post at once. It explained the reason of the writer's apparent faithlessness. I handed it to the doctor in charge later on, and he told me that there were few visitors who were not entrusted with similar missives by some of the patients.

I also met in the grounds a venerable gentleman of benevolent appearance, who took me into a quiet corner, and asked me to lend him a farthing. I offered him a penny, which was the smallest coin I had about me. He heaved a deep sigh, and said that was no use. The Bank of England had been offered to him a bargain—the bank, with all its contents. The price was only a thousand pounds; but the Governor and company had made it a stipulation that the purchase-money should be paid in farthings. The old gentleman had already saved

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up nearly a hundred, but farthings were getting very scarce. He would gladly give five shillings each for them if I would tell him where they were to be had.

At least a dozen of the patients wrote down for me the names and addresses of their friends, with whom I was to communicate directly I returned to town. These friends had only to be informed of the whereabouts of the captives, and release would be a matter of a few hours. I stayed in the grounds, receiving these confidences, for an hour, and should have stayed longer but for the determined attitude of an old lady, who held me fiercely by the collar of my coat, while she went into very minute details of a murder which she had committed. The victim was her husband, and his crime was making faces at her. She had killed him by making faces at him—such dreadful faces, that he had died by inches of fright. She began to show me the sort of faces that had proved fatal to her victim, and I was exceedingly glad when one of the keepers came and took her away, and enabled me to beat an honourable retreat.

I retired into the great building, the prison of the guiltless, and was conducted through the various wards. The people inside were mostly those who were too ill or too dangerous to be trusted in the grounds. After the imbecile ward

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of a workhouse, the sick ward of a lunatic asylum is to me the most painful sight in the world. There was a murmur when Mr. Wilson Barrett gave us two tragedies in one evening; but in the dangerous or the sick wards of a great lunatic asylum you can see a score of tragedies altogether —twenty faces that, once seen, will never be forgotten. You are gazing at the fifth acts of a dozen tragedies all at once; and as you gaze you feel how much more merciful it would be if the heroes and heroines died as they do in tragedies on the stage, instead of lingering for years in the terrible condition in which you see them.

It was not in the dangerous or the sick wards that I came upon the clergyman and the clown, but in a ward where a few quiet patients, who did not care to go out, were gathered together. The clergyman sat in a great armchair in a corner by the fire, his face hidden in the shadow. The clown sat on a low stool at his feet. My courteous guide pointed them out to me at once. Speaking in a low voice, that his words should not reach the two madmen, he told me their story.

'There's a curious case in the corner yonder. You see the old gentleman with his back to the light: he's a clergyman of the Church of England. He has been here for years; quite harmless, but

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has suicidal mania. That's quite sufficient for his friends to have him kept here.'

'Has he had any great trouble, then?' I ask.

'Go up quietly and look at him,' is the answer I receive.

I walk casually towards the little group in the corner, and give furtive glances at the clergyman. It is enough: I understand why he wishes to kill himself. The upper part of his face is eaten away by a terrible disease. The disfigurement is ghastly; no bandages can hide it.

'You see,' says my guide, 'why he suffers from melancholia and suicidal mania: he is terribly sensitive. Even here he keeps his face away from the other patients. He was a well-known preacher once, and drew an immense congregation. Now the poor fellow yonder, who was once a famous clown, is his only companion.'

'A famous clown?'

'Yes. He was the great ——' (mentioning a name once famous in the annals of pantomime).

'How did he become mad?'

'It is a curious story, as I've heard it. Years ago it used to be the custom for the men who catch clowns and harlequins after they have leaped through shop-windows and doors—you know the sort of thing—to levy black-mail. The catchers expected beer-money every night from the per-

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formers, and if they did not get it they would threaten to let their man fall. The poor fellow yonder had a hasty temper, and one night he complained that the men who had to catch him were drunk. They "rounded on him," as the saying goes, and he declared, for their insolence, he would give them no more beer-money. The following night he took his flying leap through a shop-window, expecting to be caught in the men's arms as usual. *They were not there.* The poor man fell and struck his head against a pantomime property that was lying about. He was picked up senseless, and taken to the hospital with a serious injury to the brain. He recovered his health, but his reason was gone. He has been here, harmless and quiet enough, but hopelessly insane, for over ten years.'

I looked long and sadly at the clergyman and the clown as they sat together in the dark corner, and my thoughts wandered far away to the crowded theatre and the crowded church, where both in their day had held their thousands spell-bound.

Never, surely, had the much-talked-of alliance between Church and Stage come about under more tragic circumstances! I questioned my guide minutely about the strange couple who interested me so deeply. I learned that often and often, when the poor preacher was more depressed than usual, his faithful friend the clown would cheer him up,

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and tell him strange stories of his stage career, and how once he tried to sing 'Hot Codlings' to him, and broke down, for the words would not come.

A clown singing 'Hot Codlings' to a clergyman to cheer him up! Is not the idea almost a Bab Ballad in itself? Yet here it happened under circumstances which would have checked the rising laugh in the most callous-hearted observer.

* * * * * *

Some months afterwards I visited the asylum again. I asked for the old clergyman, and they took me to the ward and showed me a vacant chair. The clergyman had died after a month of the most terrible torture from the ravages of his ghastly disease; but day and night he had been tended by the mad clown, who refused to leave the bedside of his friend, aad when the end came, wept like a child over the cold, dead face of his departed 'chum.'

They showed me the great easy-chair. It was empty, for the clown would let no one sit in it. He himself sat always in the shadow on the footstool, cherishing a memory, and guarding as something sacred the seat that for many a year had been his beloved friend's.

It is the custom for the nurses now and then to decorate the wards with sweet flowers sent by the kind souls who sometimes think of their less happy fellow-creatures.

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Whenever the new flowers come and the ward is made bright with them, the mad clown will quietly secrete a few in his old pantomimic way, and take them on the first opportunity to lay upon the old clergyman's grave. The kind doctor who has charge of the great asylum tells no story of his patients with greater sympathy than the one I have attempted to narrate briefly here. Whenever he can, he lets the poor old clown visit the churchyard with a keeper, and they tell me it is a sad and yet beautiful sight to see how reverently the once famous pantomimist will lay his purloined posy on the little grave.

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HA! HA!

'Good Heavens! Peyton, what have you been doing with yourself!'

The exclamation was forced from me by the extraordinary appearance of my friend Charley Peyton, the popular young comedian of the —— Theatre.

I had been absent from town for a couple of months, and had not seen Charley since I shook hands with him outside the Junior Garrick, the night previous to my departure for the Continent. Then he was a good-looking, bright-eyed young fellow, full of life and unusual spirits, and with a complexion that would put a Devonshire lassie's to shame. Now—I hardly know how to describe his appearance, it was so extraordinary. He was thin, and he had been stout; he stooped, and he had been upright as a poplar; his eyes were sunken and glassy, his face was deeply lined, and his skin was of that dull unhealthy tint so common to people suffering with nervous diseases; deep violet circles

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were round his eyes, his lips were pale and blistered, and as he held out his hand, in response to my ejaculation, I noticed that it trembled. I clasped it, and found it burning hot. Peyton drew his hand gently from mine, and in reply to my eager question as to what was the matter with him stammered out,

'Oh, nothing; I'm a little out of sorts.'

I was not to be put off in this way, for Charley Peyton was a great favourite of mine, and I was really distressed to see him looking so dreadfully ill. I slipped my arm through his, and strolled with him along the Strand. I plied him with questions, and cross-examined him with a pertinacity worthy of an Old Bailey barrister. I tried every art of which I was master to coax the comedian's secret from him, but he parried every attempt, and at the corner of Wellington Street left me hurriedly, saying he had some business to attend to.

Wandering back towards my chambers, I met a couple of Charley's friends, and in the course of conversation I referred to his strange appearance. They had noticed it too; in fact they told me it was the talk of the profession. None of them could say what was actually the matter with him, but everyone agreed that mental distress had a great deal to do with it.

Peyton was in the bill of the ——, and having an

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'off-night' I determined to drop in that evening, and see how far his acting was affected by his condition. Being one of the, I am afraid, small class who never ask to be passed into a theatre, however well known to the management, I put down my two shillings at the pay-hole and strolled into the pit, just before the curtain rose on the comedy in which Peyton played a principal part. The house was full, and I had to stand up at the back—a position the playgoer, whose theatrical digestion is too weak for 'the first farce,' generally has to occupy, if he selects a successful piece for his evening's entertainment.

The first act went off smoothly. Charley was capital; he made all his points, was perfectly at ease, and got a call at the fall of the curtain. He seemed full of life and spirits. I could hardly believe he was the same melancholy individual I had met in the morning.

Half-way through the second act occurs the best situation in the play. The hero, to test the affection of a girl for his friend, has to make love to her. His own sweetheart, unnoticed by him, is in a position to overhear every word he says. The interest is worked up splendidly to this point, and although what is about to happen is obvious, the attention of the audience is focussed and there is a dead silence.

Charley came gradually to the climax with the finished care of an artist. The audience watched

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his every gesture; they seemed to feel the consequence to him of the words he was about to speak, and there stole over the spectators that strong desire to call out and give warning of the impending danger which now and again is provoked by the realism of a situation and the art of a performer.

It was just when all nerves were strained, and the hush was deepest, that there came from the centre of the pit a clear and distinct 'Ha! ha!' It was over in a moment, a few heads were turned impatiently, and then every eye was fixed upon the stage again.

But the effect upon Peyton was remarkable. His whole demeanour had changed, his hands trembled, his voice was husky and indistinct, he seemed suddenly to have lost his self-possession. I saw clearly that he had gone utterly to pieces, and that the situation was irrevocably marred. He stumbled through the scene, missed his cue, flurried the other performers, and seemed only in a hurry to get on and quit the stage. The audience noticed it; they fidgeted, and whispered, and grew inattentive. The spell was broken; the second act was utterly spoiled, and when the curtain fell there was not a hand given except by the girls at the refreshment bar, and the programme-sellers, who applauded as usual.

I was so disappointed myself that I did not wait

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for the third act. I went over to the Gaiety, lit a cigar, and read the evening paper till I knew the play would be over. Then I went back to the theatre and waited at the stage-door till Peyton came out. He did not notice me, and I tapped him on the shoulder as he passed. He gave a little scream, and turned hurriedly towards me. The lamp-light fell full upon his features, and I in my turn started back. His face was ashy white, his sunken eyes were staring as though some midnight horror had riveted them, his lips were wide apart, and he breathed in a painfully gasping manner.

'Charley, old man,' I exclaimed, really frightened at his appearance; 'what *is* the matter with you?'

'Nothing.' He shook himself from my grasp, and would have passed on, but I took his arm and held him.

'Nonsense—you are seriously ill. I saw you to-night in the comedy.'

'Ah! you were there. Did you hear him?'

'Him—who?'

'*My murderer.*'

He hissed the words into my ear, and his hot breath burned my cheek.

'Listen, old fellow,' he continued, speaking hurriedly; 'I've never told a living soul before, but I'll tell you now. The fellows would have laughed at me and thought me cracked—you won't. I'll

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trust you. Where can we go where no infernal spies are listening ?'

He gesticulated so violently, he spoke and glared about him so strangely, that I felt convinced his reason was affected.

'Come to my chambers,' I said; 'we shall be quiet there.'

He never spoke a word till we got to the Temple, and I did not question him. I had some experience of mental excitement, and I knew in such cases the talking should all be on one side.

When we reached my chambers and the door had been shut, he flung his overcoat on to the sofa, thrust his hands in his pockets, and commenced to pace rapidly up and down the room.

'It's been going on for a month, old man, and I can't stand it any longer,' he said, suddenly facing me. 'Some night I'll leap off the stage and strangle the scoundrel where he sits.'

'But what is it he does ?—who is the scoundrel ?'

'You saw me change in the second act ?—you heard that "Ha ! ha !" through the dead silence ?'

'Yes.'

'Well, that same "Ha ! ha !" has come every night at exactly the same moment. At first I did not notice it; *now I listen for it.* As I get near the cursed line that brings it, I burst into a cold perspiration. I know it's coming, and I'm powerless to

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stop it. It comes and drives me mad. By Heaven!' he cried, bringing his trembling hand down violently upon the table, 'it's murdering me by inches. Look at me!'

I had no necessity to look at him. I had watched him intently during the whole of his narrative, and I saw the truth of what he said. A highly sensitive temperament was being acted upon by certain circumstances to such an extent that physical and mental health were alike being slowly undermined. Even the thought of what he had gone through was too much for him, and the perspiration was streaming down his hollow cheeks now, and his lips trembled with suppressed rage.

'If I had him here now I'd kill him like a dog!'

He brought his heel down with terrific violence on the carpet, then flung himself into the chair, and breaking down, sobbed hysterically.

I poured out some brandy, and he drank it eagerly. Then I sat down beside him and endeavoured to calm him. I knew the condition of mind and body in which he was required the greatest care and attention. I told him that, whatever might have been the cause of his illness, it was apparent that he was seriously unwell, and that he ought to go out of the 'bill' at once, and go away for a time. Rest and quiet would brace him up, and he would be all right.

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He would not listen to it.

'No,' he answered petulantly. 'I will not rest till I know why I am being murdered, and by whom.'

'Have somebody to watch in the pit.'

'It doesn't always come from the pit.' One night it is in the gallery, the next in the boxes, then in the pit. One evening I swear it came from the wings, but it is always the same voice, the same 'Ha! ha!'

'But have you tried to find out who it is?'

'Yes. We had people watching all parts of the house, and they have never been able to say who does it.'

'Do you suspect anyone?'

'No.'

'Then why bother at all about it? Let the idiot laugh, and take no notice.'

'How can I help taking notice? I tell you I *listen for it*, and it is the agony of suspense, the wondering if it is coming or if my persecution is over, the doubt as to where it will come from—these are the things that are driving me mad, and not the laugh itself.'

A few minutes later he put on his overcoat, and shaking hands, went off hurriedly, refusing to let me accompany him.

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The next night I went to the theatre out of curiosity. I was determined to see if I could not detect this extraordinary individual who went every night to the same theatre, and persistently laughed at the moment when everyone else was silent. I selected the pit as the likeliest place, and stood at the side near the orchestra, where I could see the occupants of every row from back to front. After the overture, there was a little bustle at the corner of the curtain, and presently the stage-manager stepped on to the stage, and there was a hush. He regretted to say that Mr. Peyton was suddenly and seriously indisposed, but another gentleman had kindly undertaken the part at a moment's notice, and claimed their kind indulgence. I had guessed the nature of the announcement directly I saw the manager's shirt-front at the wing; but I determined to stay and see where the laugh came from. The second act was reached, the silence came, the line which Peyton had told me was the signal for the laugh was spoken, *but no laugh came.* The curtain fell on the second act without a sign of it. I saw at once that Peyton was right in his surmise. The laugh was intended solely for his annoyance. It was too late to call at my friend's lodgings that night, but the next day I went up directly after breakfast. I was not allowed to see him. The landlady told me his mother was with him, and he

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was to see no other visitors. 'He was quite off his head, and was raving that awful about murder, and a-giving "Ha! ha's!" as is enough to curdgle honest folkses bloods.' I ascertained that my poor friend was in good hands, and that his doctor was an able man, and I left. For a month I called continually, and received varying accounts of him. I had to leave town later on for a fortnight, and when I returned, I heard that he was much better, and that having been recommended a sea voyage and total change of scene, he had accepted an engagement in America, and had set sail the very day I came home.

It was about six months after the departure of Peyton for the States that, chancing to be at the East End of London one evening, I turned into a local music-hall for an hour, just 'to study character.' The entertainment was of the ordinary kind. There were the usual comic songs, the nigger duettists, the Sisters Thinga-my-gig, and the dancing dogs. There was one thing on the programme, however, which was a little out of the beaten track. A Signor Thomasini gave a lecture on ventriloquism, accompanied by illustrations. The native skies of the Signor were evidently those which are distinctly visible from any part of Whitechapel, but in spite of his foreign name he gave ample evidence of native talent. One of his tricks particularly struck

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me at the time as excellent. Standing on the stage, he flung his voice, now into the centre of the hall, now at the back, and now up in the galleries. The phrase he used was, 'A pot of beer, please;' and this order he gave so naturally in each place that the waiters instantly answered, 'Yessir!' The entertainment made nothing but a passing impression on me, and in a week I had forgotten it.

One evening, on my arrival home, I found a card in my letter-box, 'Charles Peyton;' and underneath it was written in pencil, 'Back again. Shall be at the club to-night.' I found Peyton a different man. The voyage and the complete change of life and scene had completely restored him. Still, when he told me that he was going back into his old part at the —— Theatre, I thought I noticed a nervous twitching of the lip.

'You've quite got over the old nervousness,' I said cheerily. 'You can snap your fingers at the "Ha! ha!" man.'

'He won't come,' answered Charley, filling his pipe. 'I've made up my mind that's over. For heaven's sake, don't set me thinking of it.'

I turned the conversation at once. I saw that the old sore was not healed, and I confess I trembled for the result. The idea took possession of me that the 'Ha! ha!' *would* be heard again. I tried not to think of it, to pooh-pooh it; but somehow all

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that evening at the club, and half the night as I lay awake at my chambers, I pictured that second act and listened for the mysterious laughter.

The night of Charley's *rentrée* at the —— Theatre came. I saw him for a minute as he went in to dress. He looked well, but was evidently nervous. The few words he spoke to me showed me that he was preoccupied. I was certain that the old terror was coming slowly back. As I turned from the stage-door he caught my arm, and said in a low tone:

'If I don't hear that to-night, old fellow, I'm cured. If I do—God help me!—I'm a ruined man.'

I shook his hand and bade him not think about it; that silly business was all over. The first act went off admirably. Charley played with all his old animation and grace, and got a big call. The second act commenced, and I felt myself growing hotter and hotter. As the situation was neared my hands trembled, and I expected to hear my teeth chatter. I didn't know what to do with myself. At one time I felt I must rush out of the house. I conquered the feeling, and, gripping the seat in front of me, watched the stage. The line came. Peyton had begun to tremble. I saw his eyes wander fearfully round the house. He stumbled at a word, and seemed dazed and awkward. The line was spoken amid a dead hush.

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Suddenly over the silence rang a loud and mocking 'Ha! ha!'

I sprang up, horror-stricken. Peyton gave a shriek. Then his mouth twitching convulsively, and his eyes glaring, he rushed down to the foot-lights and tried to speak. His hands extended towards the spot where the sound had come, he hissed out some indistinct word, then, clutching at the air, fell down upon the stage, moaning. The curtain was lowered, the people rose terrified from their seats, and there was a movement towards the door. The manager, with great promptness, came before the curtain and begged them to keep their seats. Mr. Peyton, he explained, had been seized with a fit, and was being medically attended. With their permission, however, the play would be continued. Mr. So-and-So, who had understudied the part, would play it. There was a little chatter and confusion, and after an interval the curtain was raised and the comedy proceeded.

* * * * * *

For over two years Charley Peyton has been in a private mad-house. His reason never returned. His health had long been undermined by the previous torture he had endured, and this sudden shock, at a time when he hoped the persecution was over, inflicted a blow from which he will probably never recover. It was only lately that I

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have been able to fathom, to a certain extent, the mystery of that murderous 'Ha! ha!'

By a mere accident I discovered that one of the attendants at the theatre had the gift of ventriloquism, and that he had taken to it as a profession, under the name of Signor Thomasini. Careful inquiry led me to the discovery that on the night of poor Peyton's re-appearance Thomasini had been among the audience. He was recognised, and chatted with two of his old *confrères*, and I am forced to the conclusion that he had practised his art on poor Peyton in a sheer spirit of mischief, never dreaming the effect it was having. Hearing of Peyton's re-appearance, he doubtless thought it would be a lark to treat him to one of the old 'Ha! ha's!'

I afterwards ferreted the man out and taxed him with the trick. He strenuously denied it, and I have no means of bringing it home to him. I am, however, convinced that he has heard of the serious consequences of his experiment, and fears to tell the truth. I cannot in any other way account for the 'Ha! ha!' which brought my poor friend Charley Peyton to such a terrible fate.

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DETAILS.

I ONCE had a friend who was a dramatic author. I have generally remembered the proverb, 'A man is known by the company he keeps,' because I once had to write it out five hundred times as a punishment for holding conversations over the playground wall of my school with a stable-boy who used to borrow *Bell's Life* for me from the village ale-house, and tell me all about the fights between the Birmingham Chicken and Jem Mace's novice. We were all very interested in prize-fighting in those days at my school; it was about the time that Sayers and Heenan had brought the noble art to the height of its popularity. One of our boys, the most religious boy in the school, always went up to his bedroom a quarter of an hour before the others, because he liked to read the lesson for the day and study devotional works by himself before the other boys came up and began bolster-matches and comic stories and conundrums.

One night the head-master went up unexpectedly

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and found the lesson for that day a special edition of *Bell's Life,* containing a particularly lively account of a fight which had just come off in the Home Districts. The good little boy was never allowed an extra quarter of an hour to his devotions again.

But I am rambling. I repeat that I have always borne in mind the necessity of being particular about the company I keep, and in allowing myself to be friendly with a dramatic author I fully calculated the dangers of the situation.

A dramatic author, if he is successful, is a man any respectable person may be seen with without loss of dignity. An unsuccessful dramatic author is—well, for further particulars see the notices of the unsuccessful one's plays. The worst crime a man can perpetrate is to fail in anything which challenges public attention, and a play, a war, and a trial for murder are the three things that attract more public attention nowadays than anything else.

I knew the dramatic author I am going to write about very well indeed. I never asked him for an order, because I don't believe in orders. If managers paid their company, their authors, their scene-painters, and their staff with bits of paper, then I should not mind going in with a 'bit of paper' myself; but while the treasury is a matter of

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hard cash, playgoers ought to use nothing else as a means of access to the Thespian temple.

But this is a detail. Let me return to my author. I knew him very well indeed, and was therefore very much shocked to receive a letter from him just prior to the production of a new play of his, and to find it dated from a well-known private lunatic asylum. In the letter he asked me to call on him, and I went at once. I found him not so much mad as dazed; there was the worried look in his eyes you sometimes see in a cat's when it has jumped on to a garden wall, and there are half a dozen dogs barking at it on each side.

'My dear fellow,' I said, after we had shaken hands, 'I'm sorry to see you here and looking so seedy—what is it?'

'Well,' he answered with a sigh, 'I can't tell you what it is in particular that has upset the balance of my brain, but in general I put it down to details.'

'Details?'

'Yes. You see, this play I'm bringing out is a very big affair. It has twenty scenes, and the action has to be kept up right through. There are forty-three characters, and what with cutting it, and alterations at rehearsals, and a little misunderstanding with the scene-painters and the stage-

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manager, things became a little mixed, and in trying to get them right I've gone—well, it's no use mincing the matter—I've gone mad!'

'But surely, if your MS. was straight at first, you can put it straight again?'

'No; you see, my first act's summer—must be summer for the plot—and I forgot there was no hunting in summer, and a hunting accident starts the story. Of course, it's only a detail; but I can't cut the hunting out.'

'You could have left the hunting in and made it winter?'

'No; because six months elapse between Acts I. and II., and the second act must be winter. Then the third act's early spring, and I forgot to tell the artist, and he's painted a lovely garden scene full of summer flowers, and summer flowers twine round the porches; and then the next act is in two scenes, half an hour between each, and in the first the heroine's in one street, and in the second she's in St. James's Park. The street has a bright autumn glow on it, and St. James's Park is covered with snow that must have taken a whole day, at least, to fall so thickly and lie so deep, and I must have the snow because she has to faint in the snow, and the dialogue's all about freezing; and I can't have it put in the first scene, because it upsets everything, and as there is only half an hour

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between the two, you see, old chap, how awkward it is.'

'I do, indeed; but surely you can have the scene repainted?'

'No; there isn't time. We didn't get the scenes set till yesterday, and the play comes out to-morrow; and there's such a lot to do. Oh, my head, my head!'

He rested his head in his hands a moment, and then continued:

'Then, to oblige the hero, I've made a cut in the first act, and let him alter a line because it "speaks" better; and I find, when we get to the fifth act, that the "cut" won't do because it leaves something unexplained which the audience must understand; but I can't put the speech back, because it will alter all the business and affect the later acts. And there's a sensation scene that I've put in, and it's cost £300, and now it could be cut out, only all the posters are ordered and done, and the big poster is this sensation scene, and I'm sure it will settle the play, but we must have it—only it won't work now it's done, and it's no good if it would, because the only point it helped is cut out altogether, and—oh dear me! how bad my head is!'

'I'll leave you,' I said gently. 'You mustn't talk; it excites you.'

'No, no; don't go. I want some one to tell

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my troubles to; if I keep them to myself I shall go madder than ever. I hope the piece will be a success. It took me six months to write, and we've been two months rehearsing it. I was very hopeful once. I had a lovely pathetic scene between husband and wife; in fact, the play was written to lead up to that, and, just before they brought me here, a drama was produced at another theatre with the same situation exactly—a mere coincidence, but awkward for me. Of course I must sacrifice the situation now, but, as it was the keynote of the play, you can guess how it worries me. And I've had to give the villain of the piece a week's imprisonment only, instead of a year's, for a very serious affair, because the villain has long curly hair and he won't have it cut short; and, as he is seen the very day he comes out of prison by the audience, he *can't* have been in a year. It's only a detail; still, when I think of all these things, I—oh dear! oh dear!'

Here my poor friend became very violent: his aberration took a new form. He declared I was the stage-manager, sacrificing his play to the scenery; then, that I was the leading man, wanting his part altered every five minutes; then, that I was a critic, with a cruel eye, making no allowance for anything; and then he declared I was a funny man in the pit, who pretended to cry, and made every-

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body roar through the pathos on the first night. And as in each of these characters he chose to anathematize me severely and throw things at me, I thought it was time to say good-bye.

I have heard since that my friend is progressing towards recovery. He is the only dramatic author I ever knew, and if his *confrères* are in the habit of developing similar symptoms, I don't wish to know another.

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SUNDAY'S DINNER.

SUNDAY'S dinner! We know what that means at the West, among the rich and the well-to-do. But among the poor, the very poor, whose modest wage is at the utmost twelve or fourteen shillings a week, the toiling helots who live in one room in the slums —do you know what sort of a feast their Sunday's dinner is? No! Then come with me and study the question.

The Sunday's dinner of many of these people consists, alas! of no dinner at all. But there are thousands of men who, by hook or by crook, will on this one day of the week have a little meal that does not wholly consist of bread and butter.

Of course, if they are going to have meat or fish, the first thing is to get it. Even the hare, as worthy Mrs. Glasse reminded her readers, had to be caught first. Now, there are many reasons why the very poor do not shop on Saturday night. In the first place, many of them are employed themselves till the last moment in the streets, either selling their

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own stock or assisting a wealthier neighbour. The men who get their poor wage on the Saturday, too, do not as a rule come home early with it. When they do, there are other things beside marketing to be thought of. If possible, a few trifling articles are redeemed from the pawnbroker; and then there is generally a visit to the public-house, entailed by the necessity of paying up the week's score and starting a fresh one.

It is not perhaps generally known that the local publicans often trust the folks who live in their neighbourhood for drink from Monday till Saturday, and find that it pays to do so. In the public-houses, perhaps, more of Saturday evening is spent than is either good for pocket or health. But apart from these things there is one great reason why the very poor leave buying Sunday's dinner until Sunday morning.

On Saturday the aristocracy of the working-classes pick and choose, and pay the best prices for the privilege. On Sunday what is left is sold at a considerable reduction. It must be got rid of before one o'clock on Sunday — this perishable stock. The vendor's necessity is the vendee's opportunity. In the great Sunday markets of the New Cut, the Seven Dials, Brick Lane, Spitalfields, and East Street, Walworth, business is in full swing from nine a.m. until

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nearly one. There the poor housewife, with just the remnants of the week's earnings to spend, can get fish, and meat, and vegetables at an 'alarming sacrifice.' Decent mutton fetches from 7d. to 8½d. a lb.; beef, from 8d. to 9d. Inferior and doubtful stuff can be obtained for considerably less; but the poor are generally experts in the matter of quality. They handle and examine fish and meat before they buy, in a manner which would shock the stately fishmongers and butchers who have the Royal Arms over their shop-doors.

The criticisms passed on the food offered is sometimes distinctly slanderous, and it is couched in language that scarcely harmonizes with the Sabbath bells chiming from the neighbouring steeples, and calling the faithful unto prayer. The language, however, is not always stronger than some of the fish spread out for the unwary. Fish is very largely consumed by the poor on Sunday—when they can get it. Plaice, eels, mackerel, and whiting, generally called 'whitning' in the Sunday market, are found on plenty of stalls; and in the season, 'Hostend rabbits' are freely offered.

When the haggling and bargaining are over, and one by one the stalls wheel off, then the Sunday-dinner question has assumed a new phase. It has to be cooked. Those who are lucky enough to be in time for the bakehouses bear their precious

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burthen there. Those who cannot afford the expense, or who have not enough to send to the shop, do the best they can at home; and here the terrible deficiencies of all inducements to thrift and cleanliness in the homes of the poor becomes painfully apparent. Ovens, boilers, coppers, there are none, and various are the devices resorted to to cook Sunday's dinner. An old battered gridiron is routed out or borrowed—sometimes a dilapidated frying-pan does duty; but the 'chef' has a difficult task at best. I have seen Sunday's dinner cooked on the end of a bit of stick at the fire by mother, while the eldest boy caught the gravy in a saucer. Father does not as a rule take part in the culinary rites. He is out getting an appetite, or waiting for the public to open, and passing the interval in discussing whatever may be the objects of mutual interest with his neighbours.

Sometimes even when the dinner has been cooked there is a slip 'twixt dish and lip. Father has been known to come in the worse for liquor at two o'clock, and because dinner is not ready, seize the 'joint' and throw it at mother. Sometimes when the dish returns from the bakehouse, Billy, the eldest boy, is observed to be holding his head high as he bears it along. It is not wicked pride at the size of the beef or the number of the potatoes that causes Billy's loftiness. Alas, no! The family,

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with one nose, discovers the bitter truth in a moment. Perhaps father has been to market instead of mother, and his lack of experience has been traded upon. The meat that looked so well is unfit for consumption.

These are dark sides, however, to Sunday's dinner; there is a brighter, and it is one which, had I space, I could exemplify with many a true and touching story. Often and often these wretched one-roomed family dinner-parties are brightened by the presence of a guest—some poor creature worse off than the family, who is invited to share the little that there is. The little boy and girl upstairs, whose mother is in the hospital, are asked, perhaps; or the poor old chap with the rheumatics, whose daughter, in service, has forgotten to send the promised half-crown, and who is dinnerless and fireless. The poor help the poor with a thriftless generosity that is marvellous. I will be bound that you shall go down the meanest slum on any Sunday you like, and you shall find half a dozen instances of the poor little Sunday's dinner—the oasis of meat in the wilderness of potatoes—being shared with some forlorn and shipwrecked brother or sister, who has reached even a lower depth of poverty than the host or hostess. There are, in these great tenements, children who, but for this generosity, would lie in the cold garrets, and cry, and hunger from Saturday

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till Monday, because the bread-winner was in prison. It is no uncommon thing, alas! for father or mother to get drunk on Saturday, and fight, and have Sunday's dinner provided at the expense of the country, while the innocent little ones at home starve.

But our business is with those who *do* have dinner. Let us return to them. After the meal is over, sometimes Johnny and Mary, who go to the Board School, and can read, entertain their parents with a little light literature. Where the Sunday paper is beyond the humble means of the ménage, the bit of paper in which the fish or the meat was wrapped is resorted to. Johnny spells the hard words out, and gradually masters his subject, and begins. Oh, the joy of the family if the torn half-sheet contains a murder or a battle! Oh, the long faces that they pull if, after Johnny has struggled with words he never met with before, it is discovered that 'the readin'' is all about the price of American rails, or a fragment of a parliamentary debate! But it must not be imagined that in these poor families the Sunday afternoon is given up to purely intellectual diversions. Often another work-day commences when dinner is done. Mother and the girls have to be off with the 'watercreases,' and the boys go out with oranges, and father does his duty in that station of life into which he has been called, with a

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basket of periwinkles or shrimps. The 'creases,' purchased at six in the morning in the market, are taken from under the bed and washed in such water as can be obtained, the oranges and the winkles are shouldered, and off go the family to try and earn enough to pay the rent to-morrow, and buy more stock to go on with.

The non-traders and those who have no Sunday work, loll and loaf about the dull street, gossip and quarrel, and fight until the public-houses open, and then too often spend the last of the week's wage. Some of them get out into the Parks that are nearest; some of them rest at home; but for those who cannot be got to church there is, alas! nothing in the way of elevating recreation to contend with the gin-palaces. I am one of those who believe that the Sunday of the poor man might be made less colourless and more ennobling, without in any way injuring religion or 'desecrating the Sabbath.' One thing is certain, that the road to heaven is more likely to lie through a gallery of God-given Art than through a den of man-made alcoholic abominations. It is folly to talk of museums keeping from a place of worship men who never were inside a church in their lives. They would be far fitter for the church and its lessons if they had mastered the teachings of our great national collections. Educate the eyes of the masses, for through

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their eyes lies the royal road to their hearts and to their souls.

Perhaps I am wrong to say so much, but I know a little of Sunday in the slums, and I know something of the dumb yearning for something better and brighter that is to be found in the best of these people. I am not writing of artisans here. The aristocracy of the working classes have a Sunday dinner that is a feast of Lucullus by the side of the poor little repasts I have tried to sketch. The wild struggle for the Sunday meal, the shifts, the disappointments, and the disasters attending it, only the very poor—those earning precarious livelihoods—know. But—and here the great law of compensation comes in—with all the troubles and all the shifts, and pinching, and struggle, and disappointment, I question if, on the day of rest, when rich folks sit at groaning tables, and well-to-do families gather together to eat, drink, and be decorously merry, there are any of them who so thoroughly enjoy the 'Sunday's dinner' as the one-roomed feasters in the melancholy slums of London.

THE END.

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